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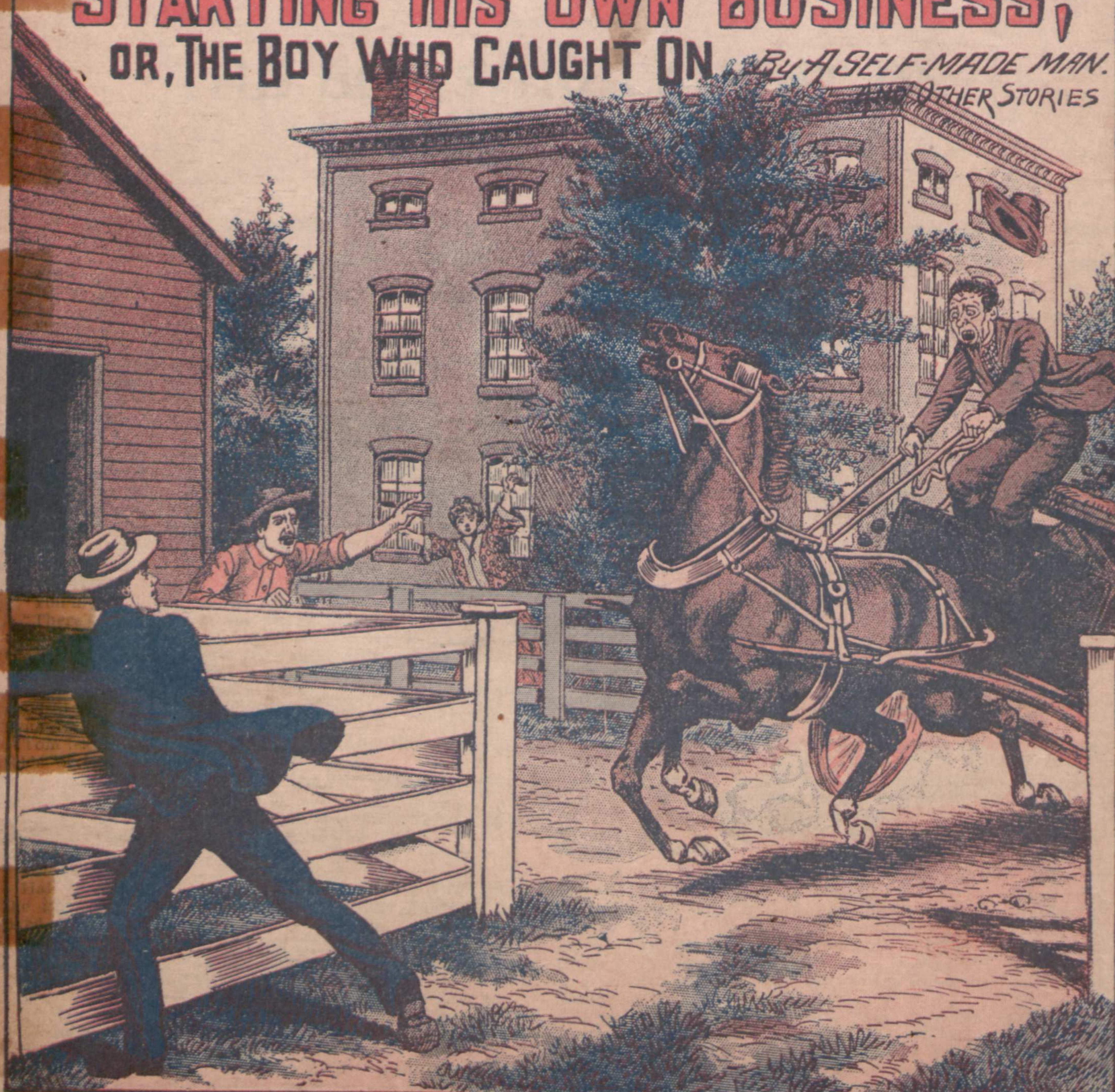
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FAIRY FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF
BOYS THAT MAKE MONEY.

STARTING HIS OWN BUSINESS;
OR, THE BOY WHO CAUGHT ON

BY A SELF-MADE MAN.
AND OTHER STORIES



At that moment a horse and wagon came tearing up the road. Farmer Whipple was standing up and pulling hard but ineffectually at the reins. To avert a smash-up against the fence, Tom grabbed the gate and swung it open.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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STARTING HIS OWN BUSINESS

— OR —

THE BOY WHO CAUGHT ON

By **A SELF-MADE MAN**

CHAPTER I.

TOM SHERIDAN AND HIS SURROUNDINGS.

"Where are you bound, Tom?" asked Bob Pennington.

"After the doctor."

"For your aunt?"

"Yes. She's very bad. I'm afraid she's going to die," said Tom Sheridan, gulping back a lump in his throat, while his eyes filled with tears.

"Too bad," replied Bob. "I'm dead sorry for her. She's had a pretty hard time of it for some time back, ever since—"

And then he stopped and kicked a dent in the country road.

"I know what you mean, Bob," said Tom, solemnly. "She has had a hard time of it. No one knows that better than me. I've tried to make things as easy for her as I could; but Mr. Bagley has simply acted like a brute all along. He's down at the Corners now, getting his usual jag on, I guess, though where he gets the money to fill up on is a mystery to me. When she's gone he'll go to the dogs, not but that he's pretty near there now."

"You'll pull out, I suppose," said Bob.

"There's nothing else for me to do. I'd have gone away from here long ago, only for aunt. I wouldn't leave her to the mercy of that hog not for a million dollars."

"You've done the square thing by her, Tom."

"I've tried to. She was my father's sister, and was always good to me. I don't like to lose her, but she'll be happier away from this life."

Tom leaned his arm on the rail fence and hid his face in the folds of his jacket.

He felt very badly, indeed, and his friend respected his feelings.

"Well," he said, pulling himself together, "what's the use of kicking against fate? Are you coming my way?"

"I'm going to the village."

"Come on, then."

Half a mile down the road the boys parted, Tom entering the gateway before a neat-looking cottage where Dr. Kent lived.

The physician had just returned from visiting a patient, and his buggy stood in the back yard waiting for the hired man to take the horse out.

The order to do so was countermanded, and Tom and the doctor were soon driving up the road toward the miserable dwelling where the lad lived with his aunt, Mrs. Sarah Bagley, and her shiftless husband.

Once on a time that wretched habitation had been a neat and comfortable cottage, with a good piece of ground for vege-

tables and fruit trees, the whole surrounded by a white picket fence.

There had also been a hen-house, and pig-styes, and a small barn.

All this, however, was altered now.

The garden and small orchard had run wild with weeds.

The pigs and poultry, and cow, had been sold, while the hen-house, pig-styes, and part of the barn had been pulled down for fuel.

Ten years since that desolate place had been the well-furnished, comfortable home of William Bagley and his contented wife Sarah.

He was a carpenter and builder and had plenty of work.

He owned the cottage and ground, and was considered fairly prosperous.

He had a little money saved, and he hoped one day to add a neighboring bit of property to his possessions.

The owner of the property died suddenly, and the opportunity was offered to him to get the place cheap for cash.

But he didn't have the cash, and he hated to mortgage his own little property.

While he was considering the matter he discovered that a well-to-do farmer on the other side, a man whom he hated, was after the property, too.

He was in a quandary, for he didn't want Farmer Whipple to get it.

However, he had the advantage of the first chance. Unfortunately, at this juncture a reckless acquaintance of earlier years turned up.

He had just come out of prison, but kept that fact to himself.

He learned how Bagley was fixed, and taking advantage of his old weakness for liquor, which he had, to a certain extent conquered, got him intoxicated one night and persuaded him to take part in an enterprise which promised considerable monetary results.

It was nothing more nor less than the robbery of Farmer Whipple's home.

Bagley's friend, Tom Johnson, had sent a note to the farmer, telling him that his uncle, a wealthy farmer in the next county, was dying, and that Whipple and his wife must come there at once.

Johnson calculated that this would leave the house at his mercy.

The scheme would probably have succeeded only if it happened that the uncle in question had set out to make a visit to his nephew, and the two parties came together on the road.

Farmer Whipple was much astonished to meet the man in good health he supposed to be dying.

Perhaps he was also disappointed, for he yearned for his uncle's money.

Explanations ensued, and these gave Whipple a strong suspicion that something was wrong.

The combined party hurried back to the Whipple farm, arriving just in time to capture Johnson, and the intoxicated Bagley, red-handed.

Both were tried and sent to the penitentiary for five years.

When Bagley got out he was a changed man.

His return to the village was eyed with suspicion.

His wife, who had borne up as well as she could under the disgrace, had managed to get along after a fashion.

She was the only one who gave him a welcome when he came back, the only one who stood his friend, and a poor return she got for it.

He made no attempt to go to work; in fact, nobody wished to employ him, and the first thing he did was to mortgage his home.

With the money he sought the questionable society at the Corners, and commenced the downward path.

About this time, Tom Sheridan, a bright and industrious lad, came to live with the Bagleys.

Tom was an orphan, and Mrs. Bagley was his dead father's only sister.

The boy soon saw how things were going, and as he grew older he remonstrated with Mr. Bagley, who drove him away from the cottage.

He went to work for Farmer Pennington and stayed with him about a year.

Then his aunt was stricken with a lingering illness and Tom went back to the cottage to do what he could for her, for nobody else would stay with her on account of her husband, who had got pretty low by this time.

Several times she had seemed at the point of death, but had pulled through.

Tom was her only consolation and support, and he nobly responded.

On the day our story opens she had been taken with one of her sinking spells, and from the way she looked Tom was afraid that she wouldn't get over it.

The only thing he could do was to go for the doctor.

When they reached the cottage Mrs. Bagley seemed to be better.

The doctor's experienced eye saw that she could not live long—not many hours at the most—and after he had done what he could for her he took Tom aside and told him what he might expect.

The boy was shocked and upset, though he had practically expected it.

He smothered his grief as best he could and sat down by his aunt's bedside to stick to her to the last.

Night found him still there.

He made no attempt to get any supper for himself, as he had no heart to eat.

His aunt, who had been in a semi-conscious state for some time, came to herself about nine o'clock.

"Tom, I am going to die," she said, in a weak voice. "I feel it here," putting her hand on her heart. "I shan't live till morning. Where is William, my husband? Hasn't he come home yet?"

"No, aunt. He doesn't usually get back till after midnight."

"I must see him, Tom. I must see him before I die," she cried, feverishly.

"You'll see him all right," he replied, reassuringly.

"But I must see him now. He's at the Corners. You'll go for him, Tom, and bring him to me, won't you?" she begged, earnestly.

"There is no one to stop with you if I go, aunt."

"No matter. I shall want for nothing. Do go at once and bring him home. I want to see him before I die."

She was so insistent that Tom felt that he must oblige her. So he kissed her tenderly and departed on his errand.

He made all haste to reach the Corners.

This was the junction of three roads, two miles outside the village.

It consisted of a blacksmith shop, a small, general store, several scattered houses and a road-house.

The latter carried on a thriving business, especially in the barroom.

Customers were to be seen there at all hours of the day and well into the night.

The steadiest one of all was William Bagley, who, in the course of five years, had spent several hundred dollars over the bar.

He had ceased to be a profitable customer, but because he was useful in a way, he was tolerated and furnished with drink when he couldn't pay for it.

Had any one wanted to find Bagley he would have gone to the barroom of the road-house, and that is where the boy went as straight as he could go.

He had never been in the place before, and he hated the necessity that forced him to go there that night; but there was no help for it.

The place was dim with tobacco smoke, and at first Tom was not able to see the object of his errand.

At length he saw him at a table with three other men, all drinking, talking and smoking, as if life held no better employment.

He walked straight up to his aunt's husband and tapped him on the shoulder.

The man turned his inflamed countenance toward him and recognized him.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said. "What do you want? How's the old woman?"

The indifferent and insulting way the words were spoken made Tom's blood boil with indignation.

It would probably have afforded him a certain satisfaction to have struck Mr. Bagley to the floor.

But he did not dare show his anger under the circumstances.

"Aunt Sarah is dying," he said, huskily. "She wants to see you, and sent me to fetch you."

"Oh, she did?" snarled Bagley, who was in a quarrelsome humor. "She sent you to fetch me. You go back and tell her I'll come when I get good and ready."

"But she wants to see you now."

"What do I care what she wants?" he cried, with an impatience. "Do you s'pose I'm goin' to leave my friends just to oblige her? Not by a jugful."

"If you don't come you may never see her alive again," persisted Tom.

"Well, I'm not worryin' about her dyin'," replied Bagley, heartlessly. "She's been dyin' several times, but I notice she didn't turn up her toes, just the same. Now just go back and mind your own business, d'ye understand? Maybe you're dry and would like a drink, first. There's the bottle—help yourself."

"I wouldn't touch the vile stuff," answered the boy, with much spirit.

"You wouldn't, eh?" cried Bagley, with a wicked grin. "I've a great mind to make you, you sanctimonious little monkey! What say? Shall we pour some down his throat?" he added, turning toward his associates, and at the same time grabbing Tom by the sleeve of his jacket.

"You won't pour any down my throat, Mr. Bagley," he said, resolutely.

"Oh, I won't? We'll see whether I won't."

He attempted to seize Tom around the waist, but the muscular boy shook him off.

One of the other men, however, caught him by the arm, while Bagley, catching up the bottle, labeled whisky, staggered on his feet.

Tom, realizing that he was in an embarrassing position, started to get out of it without regard to consequences.

Failing to disengage his arm, he struck at the man who held him.

Swat!

The blow reached the fellow's jaw and he fell against Bagley.

The latter lost his uncertain balance and both men fell together.

The bottle was smashed against the table.

Bagley held on to the jagged end and, as his hand swung around, he struck his companion a glancing blow, cutting open his cheek.

The wounded man, bleeding like a pig, jumped on Bagley and began to pound him.

Tom made use of his chance to leave the barroom in a hurry.

CHAPTER II.

TOM IS THROWN ON HIS OWN RESOURCES.

Tom started for the cottage, conscious that his errand had been fruitless.

He saw that there was little chance of Mr. Bagley appearing at his dying wife's bedside for some hours, and he did not know what kind of report to make to his aunt, who he knew was feverishly anxious to see her husband.

His feelings toward Bagley, never of a pleasant character, were now decidedly aggressive.

He blamed him for all the misery that had befallen his father's sister for the past nine years, and especially for his treatment of her since he had returned from the penitentiary.

When he opened the back door and entered the kitchen, the very silence of the place struck a chill to the boy's heart.

A strange premonition that something had happened to his aunt during his short absence fell upon him like an ice-cold blanket.

He ascended the stairs to the bedroom on the floor above and softly entered.

His aunt lay on the bed, just as he had left her, the soft glow of the lamp shading her face, but to his sharp eye there was something about her that looked different even across the room.

He stopped and listened intently.

Not the faintest sound or movement came from the bed.

With a great fear oppressing him, he crossed the room and looked down at her.

The dropped jaw and staring eyes told their story.

His aunt was dead.

It was a terrible shock for Tom, and for some time he was quite overcome by grief, but at length he pulled himself together and proceeded to tie up her lower jaw and close her eyes, on which he put a couple of small pebbles that he found on a shelf.

After that he sat down to pass the night as a silent and mournful watcher.

About two in the morning he heard a voice in the road, singing discordantly.

"That's Mr. Bagley," he muttered, a hard look coming into his young face. "Well, I see his finish right here. The only friend he had in the world is gone. After this he'll have to carry his jag somewhere else. The lawyer who foreclosed the mortgage months ago, but who permitted us to live here because he didn't want to turn aunt out into the road, will now take possession of the property and turn it to some account."

The door banged downstairs as Bagley entered the kitchen.

In a moment or two Tom heard him staggering upstairs.

Finally he appeared in the doorway, clinging to the sides.

He was a picture for fair.

He had been badly handled in the scrap brought about by his ineffectual effort to force liquor on Tom, and his face looked as ugly as sin.

The boy, after one glance at it, scented trouble, and he steeled himself to meet it.

He was in a humor to stand no fooling from the dead woman's husband, and was plucky and strong enough to resist any aggression on the part of the drunken man.

Bagley gazed around the room before entering, and his eyes rested on the boy.

Then they began to twinkle with a tipsy fury, and, rolling up his sleeves as he advanced, he made direct for Tom.

The lad got on his feet with a deliberation that showed he was prepared to meet the issue, whatever it might be, and his eyes flashed resentfully.

"Now, you little monkey, I've got you and I'm goin' to thrash you within an inch of your life!" snarled Bagley.

"You'd better not touch me, Mr. Bagley, if you know when you're well off," replied Tom. "I've taken all I'm going to from you. If you had the feelings of a mouse you'd respect the presence of the dead, but I don't imagine that you have any."

"Dead!" exclaimed Bagley, coming to a stop. "What d'ye mean?"

"I mean your wife is dead. She died while I was over at the Corners trying to persuade you to come to her, as she begged me to do. But you wouldn't come. No, you preferred to stay with your cronies. Well, you'll have full swing after this to stay with them right along—if they'll let you. It's a long lane that hasn't a turning, and you've reached the turn of yours. I hope you'll enjoy the sensation."

Bagley turned from Tom and staggered to the bed.

"Dead!" he muttered. "I don't believe it. You're only shammin' to save that little villain from a lickin'. Wake up! Wake up! Or I'll pull you out of bed."

He grabbed the dead woman by the arm and shook her roughly.

"Let her alone, you brute!" flashed Tom, springing forward and pulling him away.

Bagley swung half around and crashed over a chair.

The shock sent the liquor fumes to his head.

He made one feeble effort to rise, and then rolled over, stupidly, and presently was snoring in a drunken sleep.

The boy regarded him with contempt.

"You're a fine specimen to call yourself a man, you are," he said. "If I wanted a warning to leave liquor alone I'd find it in you. You ought to be photographed as you are now. The picture would make a fine illustration for a temperance lecture."

Tom grabbed him by the arms and dragged him over to the opposite side of the room where he left him and returned to his post.

He replaced the pebbles on his aunt's eyes, smoothed out the rumpled bedclothes, and sat down to await the coming of morning.

At length daylight dawned, and after washing his face he started for the Pennington farm.

He found Bob just coming out in the yard.

"Hello, Tom!" exclaimed his friend, in some surprise at seeing him so early. "What brings you here at this hour? How's your aunt?"

"She's dead," replied Tom, sadly, but without a tear.

"Dead! My gracious, you don't say! When did she die?"

"Last night. I would like you to come over and help me out a bit."

"Sure I will. We'll have breakfast in a little while. You'll eat with me, of course. I'll tell father I'm going over with you."

The Penningtons liked Tom, and they sympathized with him in his loss, though they believed that his aunt was far better off at rest.

Mrs. Pennington said that she and her girl would go to the cottage in a little while and wash and lay out the dead woman for burial.

Tom thanked her for the proposed kindness.

Mr. Pennington asked the boy if he needed any money for immediate expenses, and offered him a \$20 bill.

Tom accepted it gratefully, promising to repay it when he could.

He said that the furniture and personal property of his aunt ought to easily cover the expenses of her funeral.

If there was anything left over he intended to expend it on a tombstone.

"If Mr. Bagley interferes with me in any way, or asserts his right to the property necessary to bury my aunt, I'll swear out a warrant against him, and have him put in the lock-up as a vagrant," said Tom, resolutely.

"I would," replied Mr. Pennington. "What do you expect to do after the funeral, Tom?"

"Hustle for myself," replied the boy, promptly.

"I can give you something to do on the farm for a while, and that will give you time to consider the future."

"Thank you, Mr. Pennington. I will accept your offer."

After breakfast Tom returned to the cottage with Bob. Bagley was still snoring away where Tom had left him during the night.

With Bob's help Tom carried the man into a back room, laid him upon the bed he was accustomed to use since his habits had got so bad, and locked him in.

"Now he's out of the way," said Tom. "If you don't mind staying here on watch, Bob, I'll call on Mr. Mold, the undertaker."

Bob had no objection, and Tom departed on his errand.

He came back with Mr. Mold, and while the undertaker was performing his first duties with the dead, Bagley woke up, fairly sober, and finding himself locked inside the room, started to kick the door open.

Tom then let him out.

After raising a small ruction, Bagley discovered that his wife was indeed dead.

That quieted him down, and for a little while it looked as if he was sorry for his conduct toward the poor woman.

Tom relented toward him so far as to cook him some breakfast.

Soon after eating it he disappeared, and the boys guessed he had gone to the Corners to drown his feelings in liquor.

He turned up late that night, full, as usual, but not in such a quarrelsome mood.

He was easily persuaded to go to bed, and the watchers were glad to be relieved of his presence.

Next day Mrs. Sarah Bagley was buried in a sunny corner of the village churchyard, and her husband remained sober long enough to accompany the funeral party, in company with Tom, as chief mourner.

After the funeral Tom went over to the Pennington farm-

house, where for the next month he shared Bob's room and worked at odd jobs about the place.

In the meantime the contents of the cottage was sold at auction to liquidate the funeral and other expenses, and the property taken in hand by the owner, who proceeded to put it into shape for a tenant.

Bagley, being thrown out on the charity of an unsympathetic world, disappeared, and Tom did not care if he never saw him again.

CHAPTER III.

TOM HAS A RUN-IN WITH THE WHIPPLES.

Farmer Whipple, for the attempted burglary of whose house Tom Johnson and William Bagley had served a five-year sentence in the penitentiary, lived on a good-sized farm which adjoined the Pennington's.

He was not a popular man in the neighborhood, but that fact didn't worry him.

He was also a man of strong prejudices, who never forgave a real or a fancied injury, and his wife and son Ezra were very much like him.

Bagley might have got off with a lighter sentence, as it was shown at his trial that he hardly knew what he was about the night of the robbery, but for Whipple's animosity.

While Bagley was serving his time, the Whipple family made things as hard as they could for poor Mrs. Bagley, though everybody knew that she had no hand in or sympathy with her husband's crime.

Tom Sheridan, when he came to live with his aunt, also came in for his share of the Whipple family's aversion and suspicion.

Ezra Whipple hated Tom because he was much better-looking than himself, and because he soon established himself in the favorable estimation of the girls and boys in the neighborhood, which he never could do himself.

He tried his best to lord it over Tom on the strength of the fact that his father was regarded as one of the most prosperous farmers in the county, and because Tom was poor.

But it didn't work very well, for Tom was independent and wouldn't stand any nonsense from any one.

The fact that Ezra lived in the finest and biggest house outside of Liberty didn't impress Tom with a sense of young Whipple's superiority.

Both he and Bob had Ezra down pretty fine.

They knew him for a blow-hard and a coward—a boy ready to make the most of any advantage that came his way, but the first to put up a squeal when things went against him.

One morning, Mr. Pennington sent Tom over to Farmer Whipple's to borrow a small tool which he wanted to use, but found he could not buy in Liberty.

Tom would rather have been excused from the errand, but as Bob had gone to the village for something, there was no one else to go.

So he put on his best clothes, none too good at that, and started for the Whipple farmhouse, a rather imposing three-story, square-built frame structure fronting directly on the road.

There stood a small barn between the fence surrounding the house and the fence encircling the field beyond, and Tom, seeing somebody at work therein, walked in.

The somebody in question was Ezra in his working clothes. The moment his eyes lighted on Tom his brow clouded.

"What do you want here?" he asked, in a surly tone.

Tom mentioned the object of his errand in a pleasant way.

"I don't know nothin' about the tool," replied Ezra.

"Where can I find your father?" asked Tom.

"Dunno. Go hunt for him," replied Ezra, ungraciously.

"Is he out in one of the fields?"

"No. he ain't."

"Is he in the house?"

"No, he isn't in the house."

"Look here, Ezra Whipple, why can't you talk to a fellow in a civil manner?" asked Tom, disgusted with the snappishness shown by the other.

"I don't want to talk to you at all. I don't want nothin' to do with a common boy like you. Your uncle was a jail-bird, and your aunt was a—"

"Don't you dare say a word against my aunt," exclaimed Tom, threateningly. "If you do, I'll make you feel sorry for it."

"Keep away from me or I'll hit you with this shovel,"

snarled Ezra. "If my father was here he'd kick you off the farm. We don't want you around here."

"You're a nice boy, you are, I don't think," retorted Tom, holding himself in check with an effort.

"Yah!" snorted Ezra, favoring him with a vindictive look. "Why don't you go when I tell you we don't want you around?"

"I'm going. I wouldn't waste my time on such a disagreeable young cub as you are," answered Tom, turning around and walking out of the barn.

He walked to the corner of the field fence where there was a wide gate communicating with the pasture, and paused, undecided whether to wait a while for the owner of the property or not.

At that moment a horse and wagon came tearing up the road.

Farmer Whipple was standing up and pulling hard but ineffectually at the reins.

To avert a smash-up against the fence, Tom grabbed the gate and swung it open.

The horse, which was frightened and unmanageable, dashed blindly at the opening and passed through.

The wagon was not quite so fortunate.

The hub of the forward wheel came into collision with the gate-post.

Crash!

The wagon came up all standing, the horse tore itself free and kept on, pulling the farmer, who had lost his balance through the shock, over the dashboard.

Ephraim Whipple turned a half somersault, struck the animal's back and tumbled, head first, into the dirt, where he was dragged several yards before the reins slipped from his fingers.

Ezra had rushed out of the barn as the runaway approached the fence and saw Tom's prompt action, which clearly saved the horse's life.

Then he stood gazing, open-mouthed, at the stranded wagon which filled up the opening, while Tom vaulted the fence and hastened to Farmer Whipple's aid.

"You're not hurt, are you, Mr. Whipple?" asked Tom, as he raised him up.

The farmer spat out a mouthful of dirt and gazed about him in a bewildered manner.

For a moment he hardly knew what had happened to him.

If Tom had told him that an earthquake had just shaken up the neighborhood he would have believed the boy.

His face was all streaked with moist soil, and his iron-gray hair was plastered with it, while his clothes looked as if they had been in a mangling machine.

He was certainly a sight.

"Who are you?" asked the farmer, as he began to come to himself.

"Tom Sheridan."

The farmer rubbed his eyes and stared at him with a hard look.

"What are you doin' here?"

"Mr. Pennington sent me over to borrow—"

"He ain't got no business to send you here to borry nothin'. I don't want you on my property, d'ye understand. I won't have none of the Bagley brood around here. Fust thing I know my house might be robbed ag'in."

"What do you take me for, Mr. Whipple?" asked Tom, indignantly.

"I don't take you for nothin' good. So git out of here jest as quick as you kin, or I'll set one of the dogs on you."

"All right. I'll report your generous reception of me to Mr. Pennington," replied Tom, thoroughly disgusted with the farmer. "If it hadn't been that I opened the gate your horse would have probably broken his legs, and you'd had to shoot him, while you might have broken your own neck. If you were half-way decent you wouldn't treat me this way after what I did for you; but I suppose you don't know any better," concluded Tom, sarcastically, for he was pretty mad at the farmer's words.

"What's that, you young whippersnapper?" roared Mr. Whipple, furiously. "You dare to talk to me in that fashion. Just wait till I git my whip, I'll make your back tingle."

He scrambled to his feet and started for the wagon.

Tom, perceiving that the farmer intended to adopt rigorous measures, concluded not to wait for him to carry out his inhuman intentions.

He jumped the fence as the man began to climb into the wagon after the whip.

"Stop him, Ezra!" he shouted to his son. "Don't let him

git away. He insulted me, and I'm goin' to take it out of his hide."

Tom made no attempt to run, as he considered that would be both undignified and cowardly.

He simply walked off without paying any attention to Ezra.

The boy, however, encouraged by his father's presence, started to head Tom off.

Tom made an effort to avoid him, but finding that he couldn't, stopped.

"If you know what's good for you, you won't block my way, Ezra Whipple. I am on the public road now, so get out of my way."

"You can't get away from here till you've had a lickin'," grinned Ezra.

"Can't I? We'll see about that. Are you going to move?"

"No, I'm not."

Tom seized him like a flash and, tripping him up, walked on, leaving him wallowing in the dust and yelling that he was killed.

Ephraim Whipple, whip in hand, leaped from the wagon and came tearing after Tom, with blood in his eye.

"You young rascal! I'll skin ye within an inch of your life!" he shouted.

Seeing that he could not escape unless he took to his heels, which he scorned to do, Tom stopped and faced the irate farmer.

"I wouldn't advise you to touch me with that whip, Mr. Whipple," he said, calmly and deliberately. "You might regret it. You have no right to attempt to strike me for merely coming here on an errand for Mr. Pennington."

Ephraim Whipple, whip in hand, leaped from the wagon and glaring at him, said:

"You've insulted me, you beggar's brat, and I intend to thrash you."

"You mean you've insulted me several times yourself," returned Tom.

"Lick him, father, lick him good!" shouted Ezra, from a safe distance.

"Insulted you!" roared the farmer, amazed at what he considered the boy's impudence. "Why, you——"

Rage prevented further intelligible utterance, but it urged him on to immediate vengeance.

He raised the whip and lashed Tom around the body with it.

Quick as a wink, the boy seized the lash, sprang forward, grabbed the handle and wrenched the whip from the farmer's hand.

Then he tossed it over into a field on the opposite side of the road.

As he proceeded to walk away, Farmer Whipple sprang at him like a wild beast, aiming a blow at his head.

Tom ducked, put out his foot, and his enemy measured his length in the road.

The boy took advantage of his opportunity to walk quickly away, which he was permitted to do without further molestation.

CHAPTER IV.

TOM GETS INTERESTED IN A MONEY-MAKING SCHEME.

When Tom got back to the Pennington farm he reported the unfruitful result of his mission, and also told Mr. Pennington of the run-in he had had with both Farmer Whipple and his son.

"I'm not particularly surprised at Ephraim Whipple's conduct," said Mr. Pennington. "He is the most pig-headed and unreasonable man I have ever run across. His son is a chip of the old block, with the ignorance of youth added."

"You don't blame me for resenting their attitude toward me, do you, sir?" said Tom. "I didn't look for Mr. Whipple to thank me for saving his rig from a total smash-up, but I did expect he'd behave decent."

"Of course, I don't blame you, Tom. Whipple only got a small portion of what he richly deserved. I guess I'll have to send you over to the Kenilworth Farm for that harness tool, though I am not sure that Brown has it. Whipple has it, I know, but I might have known that he's not an accommodating man. You needn't start till after dinner."

"All right, sir," replied Tom, starting for the barn to resume the job he had left unfinished.

When Bob returned, Tom told him all about what had happened to him over at the Whipple farm, and Bob was tickled to death at his description of the tumble the old farmer had got when his wagon collided with the gate-post.

"I wish I had been there at the time," he chuckled. "It must have been as good as a circus act."

"It was, if you can imagine Whipple as the clown of the show."

"Then you tumbled Ezra into the road, eh?"

"I did that when he tried to hold me up so his father could get at me with his whip. I just took him by surprise. Then he lay in the dust and yelled murder."

"For a chap of his size and strength he's got mighty little pluck."

"He acts as though he had none at all, though I've heard that he's brave enough when he tackles a boy of about half his age."

"That's right. None of the boys like him, while they all like you. It's the same way with the girls. That's why he's dead nuts on you. He's jealous of you. The old man is sore on you because you're related in a way to Bagley, and he hates Bagley because of his connection with that robbery. If Bagley hadn't gone to the Old Boy of his own accord, I've no doubt he'd have hounded him out of the county. There's precious little charity in Whipple's make-up."

"He and Mr. Bagley were not good friends before that unfortunate affair," said Tom. "At least my aunt told me so. That probably accounts for Whipple being so hard on him the moment he got him in his power."

"I guess so," replied Bob.

At that moment the bell rang for dinner and the boys adjourned to the big kitchen, where the table was laid.

When the meal was over, Tom started for the Kenilworth Farm.

It was about five miles away, and he was going to walk the distance.

It took him about an hour to reach the place, and he found Mr. Brown, the owner, in his little office, which was an annex to the kitchen.

Tom handed him the note he had brought from Mr. Pennington.

Mr. Brown read it, and said he had the tool in question and would be happy to loan it.

Telling Tom to wait, he went out to his barn to get it.

The Kenilworth Farm was the biggest fruit and produce farm in the State.

The nearest railroad station to which he had to cart his goods every day was three miles to the west of Liberty village, or nine miles from the Kenilworth Farm.

This made the carriage of his produce quite an item to Mr. Brown.

Just before Tom reached the farm, Mr. Brown had received a letter from the freight department of the railroad line, notifying him of an increased rate that would go into effect on the first of the month.

As Mr. Brown's monthly freight bill was considerable as it was, he certainly did not relish the idea of paying more.

His only satisfaction was that his rival, the Ivanhoe Dairy and Fruit Farm, a mile distant, would be in the same boat.

A few minutes later Hiram Jones, proprietor of the Ivanhoe Farm, made his appearance.

He said he had called to see if he and Mr. Brown, being extensive shippers, couldn't petition the railroad company jointly, with some effect, to secure a rebate from the new tariff about to go into effect.

"This new schedule is bound to make a hole in our income, Mr. Brown," he said. "I consider it an outrage, but the railroad has us tied hand and foot because there is no other way by which we can get our stuff to the Toledo market. If there was only some means by which we could ship our stuff to Cherryville on the Maumee, where a connection could be made with the Maumee Navigation Co.'s boat, I'd be in favor switching off from the railroad altogether and sending our products all the way by water."

"Cherryville is twenty miles from here via the Maumee Branch, and it is forty-five miles by river from there to Toledo. Transport of our goods by water, if such a thing was possible, would take three times as long as it does now by rail," said Mr. Brown.

"Not quite, Mr. Brown," replied Mr. Jones. "Remember, it takes us a good hour and a half to carry our products to the station. It wouldn't take but a third of that time to carry them to a convenient wharf on the Maumee Branch."

"True enough; but what's the use of talking about such a thing when there is no suitable means of carrying our stuff down to Cherryville?" said Mr. Brown.

"Of course," said Mr. Jones. "This idea of mine is purely

a visionary plan, I must admit, but I wish somebody took a notion to send a steamboat up the branch as far as Liberty."

"It wouldn't pay, I guess, or I have no doubt somebody would have put such a thing into execution before this."

"I think a small boat did run up the branch years ago before the railroad was built through this part of the State."

"I never heard of it, but then you've lived here longer than I. The railroad was very accommodating before it was absorbed by the P., Ft. W. & C., and made a part of its system. These big trunk lines have things their own way, and shippers have to suffer. The railroad makes the rate and we have to pay it. That's about all there is to it. We'll either have to continue using the railroad or go out of business."

The gentlemen talked for some time longer on the subject of the rapaciousness of the railroad, and once or twice Mr. Jones referred to the river route again as something much to be desired but not to be expected.

Tom, instead of reading the magazine, found more interest in listening to their conversation, and by the time the interview was ended he found himself speculating upon Mr. Jones' idea of a freight line down the Maumee Branch, which formed the southern boundary of the Pennington and Whipple farms, to Cherryville.

"I think there would be money in it," he said to himself, after the two men had walked outside. "If I had the money to start such a thing I'd like nothing better than to go into it. I know a small steamboat laid up in Cherryville that would just fill the bill. I believe she could be bought cheap and run cheap. It's a wonder Mr. Brown and Mr. Jones wouldn't buy her and run her in their own interest. But probably they don't know anything about her. I think it might pay me to look into the matter in their interest. I could find out the price of the boat, what it would cost to run her up and down the branch every day, and other particulars. Then I could submit the scheme to Mr. Jones, who seems to be stuck on a water route to Cherryville, and then if he liked it and succeeded in interesting Mr. Brown in the project, and they started it, I'd probably be able to secure a good job on, or in connection with, the boat."

Mr. Brown now came back with the harness tool that Mr. Pennington wanted, and handed it to Tom, who thanked him for the loan of it and started back for the farm.

He could think of nothing else on his way but the new water freight route from that locality to Cherryville, and the more he considered it the more enthusiastic he grew over it.

He was tired of farm work, and ambitious to get into something that promised a future for him.

He was a born hustler, anyway, and thoroughly believed in the old fable "that heaven helps those who help themselves."

Many fascinating schemes had presented themselves to his mind before this, but as all required money to put into practice, and as he had no money, nor saw an immediate prospect of accumulating a sum large enough to fill the bill, he had been obliged to forget them, for the time being at any rate.

Somehow or another this water freight route strongly appealed to Tom, and he grew quite excited over the possibilities he thought he saw in it.

At any rate, by the time he got back to the farm he was fully resolved to look into the matter for all it was worth, and when Tom Sheridan determined to do a thing he always did it if it was possible to get around it.

CHAPTER V.

TOM VISITS CHERRYVILLE AND MEETS WITH A GREAT SURPRISE.

That evening Tom talked the water freight route over with Bob.

"That's a bang-up idea, Tom," said young Pennington, enthusiastically.

"That's what I think. If I can get these two big shippers to take practical interest in it, I consider I'm sure of a job. They might even let me manage it for them, considering that I'm the person to bring it forward in working shape."

"Why, of course you'd get a job, and a good one. Brown and Jones are the most important people in this section of the county. I'd like to get a job on the boat, too. I'm sick of farming."

"Would your father let you make a change?"

"Sure he would, if he thought it would benefit me."

"Well, I'd like to have you in with me, first-rate. By the way, do you think your father would help the scheme along

by letting his wharf on the branch be used for a steamboat landing?"

"Why not? He doesn't use it now at all. Besides, he could then ship farm stuff himself by water instead of carting it over to the railroad. I'll bet he'd take to your idea right off."

"Then, another thing, Brown and Jones would have to get the right-of-way from the county road, through your lane, down to the wharf, so they could cart their products to the river. Of course, your father would be entitled to some concession for this privilege."

"Oh, he wouldn't stand in the way if it was the matter of public service. He isn't that kind of man. Now, if it was Farmer Whipple, you might make up your mind right now that he wouldn't let any man alive use his lane if he thought any one was going to benefit by it."

"You're right; he wouldn't."

"He's got a wharf, too, and would expect the boat to stop at his place. It would make him boiling mad if he was cut out and forced to keep on using the railroad."

"That would be poor policy—cutting off one's nose to spite his face. His money is as good as any one else's, and I'd take it every time if I was running a freight line to Cherryville."

"If you were running the boat as your own speculation, and he knew it, I'll bet he'd rather send his stuff by rail than throw a penny profit in your way."

"That wouldn't surprise me," replied Tom. "He likes me a whole lot, I don't think; especially after to-day."

Next morning Tom told Mr. Pennington that he wanted to go to Cherryville for the day, and he received permission to do so, and some money to pay his expenses.

He walked in to Liberty and took a trolley for the town of Carlyle, a distance of fifteen miles.

There he changed to the Cherryville line, which took him through two other small towns en route, and finally landed him at his destination after a twenty-five mile ride from Liberty.

Cherryville was an enterprising town at the junction of the Maumee River and the Maumee Branch.

The first thing Tom did was to go into a restaurant and get his lunch.

Then he went to the agent of the Maumee River Navigation Co., down on the water front, and made inquiries about the steamer Elsie French.

It was quite possible that the boat had been sold since he last heard about her, and that fact did not strike him until he entered the agent's office.

If she had been disposed of, that would knock his newly conceived scheme into a cocked hat.

On getting an interview with the agent of the steamboat company, he found to his relief that the small steamboat had not been sold.

He found that she could be chartered by the day, week or month, or longer for that matter, at a sliding scale, according to the length of time contracted for.

The price included an engineer, fireman, pilot, who acted as captain, and two deckhands.

Tom got the freight rates from Cherryville to Toledo on all the products that he knew Messrs. Brown and Jones shipped East.

He inquired into all matters connected with the enterprise he had in view, and having transacted all the business that brought him to town, he boarded a trolley car for Carlyle.

As the car was passing through the suburbs of Cherryville, along a shaded street bordered by the better class of residences, he noticed smoke issuing from the second story front windows of a handsome, three-story mansion, which stood well back from the sidewalk, and was surrounded by a well-kept lawn.

"Look!" cried Tom, excitedly, to the conductor. "That house is surely on fire."

"By George, it is!" replied the man. "That's the home of Sidney French, president of the Maumee River Navigation Company. You'd better jump off and alarm the people, for they don't appear to be aware of the danger they are in. I'll give the alarm from the drug store at the next corner."

Tom sprang from the moving car and rushed into the grounds where the fire was.

He was rather surprised that nobody came running out in the usual panic-stricken fashion, crying "Fire!" and for help.

"Maybe the family is away, but there ought to be a servant or two around in the lower part of the house," he breathed. "I'll make for the kitchen."

He ran toward the rear of the dwelling.

He could not see a soul through any of the windows as he passed.

The kitchen door was closed, and as he laid his hand on the knob to try it, it was suddenly flung open in his way, and two rough-looking men rushed forth, with bundles in their hands.

They collided with the boy, and all three went down in the ground together in a heap, the bundles flying out of the men's hands.

Tom, who was as agile as monkey, was first on his feet.

Then he was treated to the surprise of his life as the men, with loud imprecations, picked themselves up.

He recognized one of them.

It was his late aunt's husband, William Bagley.

The other was Tom Johnson, but Tom did not know him, never having seen him before.

The boy was fairly staggered by the unexpected meeting with Mr. Bagley under circumstances that, to say the least, were suspicious.

"You—Tom Sheridan!" gasped Bagley, recognizing him.

"Yes," replied Tom. "What are you doing here?"

"None of your business!" snarled Bagley, looking around for his bundle.

"Yes, it is my business," replied Tom, pluckily. "You two have evidently no right in that house. You've been up to some crooked business. Robbing the place, I'll bet, for the people all seem to be away. You've set the house on fire, too."

"Blast you! You young marplot!" roared Bagley. "I've a great mind to—"

He raised his arm to strike at the boy when at that moment the cry of "Fire!" was raised in the street, and several persons came running into the grounds.

"Quick, you fool!" cried Johnson. "Let's get away. We haven't a moment to lose."

They made a snatch at their bundles to continue their retreat, but Tom blocked them.

Both men made a vicious attack on the boy, to the astonishment of the newcomers on the scene.

"Grab these men!" exclaimed Tom, dodging a vicious blow aimed at him by Johnson. "They're thieves and incendiaries."

Bagley snatched up his bundle and made a dash for the back of the grounds.

Johnson, abandoning his, followed on his companion's heels.

"Don't let them get away!" cried Tom.

Two men started after the retreating rascals, but Johnson and Bagley managed to elude them and got clear off under cover of the excitement.

In the meantime the fire appeared to have got complete control of the second story, the flames bursting from several of the windows, and a dense cloud of smoke rising into the comparatively calm afternoon air.

The fire-alarm bell was now ringing out its note, startling everybody in town.

Crowds, attracted by the smoke, began to gravitate toward the scene of the conflagration.

The two engines and the hook-and-ladder company were also on the wing by this time, creating more excitement on the streets, and drawing boys and idlers in their train.

A big crowd was lined up in the street before the blazing building, and scores of curious spectators invaded the grounds and surrounded the house at a safe distance.

A couple of men followed Tom into the kitchen of the mansion, and the first thing they saw were the bound and gagged forms of the cook and a maid, secured to chairs.

While the men were cutting them loose, Tom dashed up the back stairs to see to what extent the fire had obtained headway, and to make sure, if possible, that no other person was in peril of their lives above.

The smoke was not so dense at the back as it was in the front of the house, where it was pouring down the main stairs into the hall.

Reaching the first landing, he opened a door communicating with the forward upstairs hall.

A cloud of smoke rolled into his face.

Gasping and choking, Tom slammed the door shut again.

Recovering himself, he opened another door into a room.

The air was thick with smoke, and the boy, dropping on his hands and knees, crawled toward another door that he dimly made out through the haze.

Reaching up and turning the knob, he partially opened the door.

Dense smoke rolled forth, through which he caught the bright gleam of the flames in the room beyond.

Tom pushed the door shut, and with his eyes tingling and his breath coming in quick gasps, he crawled back to the landing.

There was a closed window on the landing.

Tom staggered to it, and, throwing it open, leaned out to catch a breath of air.

His appearance was greeted by a shout from those within range, who took him for an inmate of the house.

With a jingle of bells the first engine and hose-carriage arrived on the scene.

The firemen began to get busy with a pair of hose lines.

At that moment a fresh and thrilling aspect was lent to the situation.

The fire had by this time burned into the third story front, and from one of the windows of that section of the building a frantic scream suddenly issued, and almost immediately a lovely girl of seventeen threw up a lower sash and fell across the sill in a state of mortal terror and collapse.

CHAPTER VI.

A GALLANT RESCUE.

A cry of horror went up from the crowd in the street and on that side of the lawn, for the people realized the fair girl's peril.

Tom heard the scream, of course, and looking upward toward the spot whence it had proceeded, he saw the girl fall helpless over the window-sill.

Smoke was coming out of the window all around her, and sifting out through the other closed window of the room.

"Great Scott!" cried Tom. "She's in a bad position, and there don't seem to be any way of reaching her. If the hook-and-ladder was only here now the firemen could easily reach her, but it is impossible to go up to that floor through the house."

Casting his eyes around in feverish anxiety, Tom noted that an expert climber could make his way to the roof by way of the stout gutter-pipe close to his elbow.

But even if he did he could not save the girl without a rope to lower himself to the level of the window, where she lay in a fainting condition.

At that moment Tom noticed that an extended and stout branch from a big shade tree on the lawn projected right above the window where the girl was.

A resolution instantly formed itself in the boy's mind.

He stepped out on the sill of the window he had been leaning out of and began to climb the iron gutter-pipe like a sailor would the rat-lines of a vessel.

The crowd watched him in surprise and curiosity.

Most of the onlookers probably thought he was crazy, for they could not, of course, understand his purpose, which was to reach the roof.

Several of the firemen shouted to him to come back, but he paid no heed to them.

Onward and upward he went till he reached and grasped the horizontal gutter.

Swinging by this he managed to throw one leg over the coping.

In another moment he had scrambled onto the roof.

As he ran forward to the front of the house, where he was soon half hidden by the smoke, an automobile dashed up into the crowd.

The gentleman in it sprang to the ground and began to frantically make his way through the throng, while the richly dressed lady rose in her seat and gave every manifestation of agony of mind.

Many people recognized them as Sidney French, the owner of the burning house, and his wife.

Tom seized the projecting limb and then looked downward.

He now realized that he had undertaken a very hazardous job.

But he was not a boy to hold back because there was an element of danger to be encountered.

The girl just below him had recovered her senses and began to cry for help in a way that nerved him to make the attempt he had decided on to save her.

A second engine came dashing up on the street, and, though Tom did not know it, the hook-and-ladder was not far behind.

A score of the spectators had gone down the street to meet the hook-and-ladder and urge it forward, crying out that a girl was trapped in the third story of the burning house, and that nothing but a ladder could save her.

The crowd in the meantime was watching Tom's actions in great excitement and anticipation.

The people did not seem to get on to his object, even after he had grabbed the limb of the tree.

The general impression was that after climbing up to the roof, and finding he could not reach the girl, he was going to swing off and try to make his way to safety along the tree limb.

In a few minutes, however, they got a clear idea of his purpose when he swung off the roof and then secured a precarious foothold on the sill of the window below, with one foot, while he clung with both hands to the limb.

The tree limb supported him in that position, and the crowd, perceiving that he really intended to try and save Mr. French's daughter, sent up a loud cheer of encouragement.

The girl extended her hands toward him, appealingly.

"Save me, oh, save me!" she cried.

"That's what I'm trying to do, miss," he replied. "Crawl out on the window-sill, then catch hold of me and support yourself into a standing position. After that, throw your arms around my neck and hold on for your life."

For a moment she hesitated, for it seemed to her as though she must surely fall to the ground.

Seeing her hold back, he began to encourage her to make the effort.

Throwing a frightened glance behind her, and seeing the flames working rapidly toward the spot on which she stood, she no longer refused to take the risk.

Anything seemed better than being burned to death.

Tom's coolness in the face of great peril, and his calm directions, greatly impressed the girl and gave her confidence in him.

Slowly she made her way out on the window-sill, laying hold of Tom's leg as a support, until at last she stood up on what was to her a dizzy height.

"Now throw your arms around my neck and cling on like grim death," he said.

Closing her eyes, as a shudder ran through her frame, she obeyed him.

"Have you got a firm hold?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered, tremulously.

"Now I'm going to swing off."

He released his foot from the window and the branch surged downward under their weight.

He expected that it might snap off, and braced himself for the shock of a fall.

The limb, however, was an uncommonly strong one and only sagged about six feet.

Then they hung twenty feet in the air, but free from the burning building.

The crowd cheered lustily and a half dozen of the firemen gathered underneath to catch them and break their expected fall.

Tom had no idea of letting go.

He had muscles of steel and knew exactly what he intended to do.

As soon as the branch came to a rest he began to make his way, hand over hand, along the limb toward the trunk of the tree.

Everybody saw now that if the girl held on she was bound to escape unharmed, and their satisfaction and relief was great.

The hook-and-ladder came rushing up at this juncture, and the men tore fiercely at the first ladder on top, a small one, to get it out of the way so they could get a longer one beneath.

The flames, too, were bursting out of the window so recently vacated by the girl.

The crowd saw that but for the boy's heroic act the girl must have perished, for the hook-and-ladder had reached the scene too late to have taken her from the window.

By the time a ladder was rushed on the grounds, Tom, with his fair burden, had reached a crotch in the tree when she was able to place her foot on one of the limbs below and thus relieve her gallant rescuer of her weight.

Turning around, he planted his foot on another limb and encircled the girl's waist with his arm.

Both were now quite safe from any further danger, and the ladder was raised into the tree to assist them to descend.

The girl was received in her father's arms and fondly embraced.

He had seen the greater part of the rescue with the deepest of anxiety, hardly daring to believe that the boy would succeed in saving her from a bad fall.

As Tom started to leave the spot without waiting to be thanked, he was seized by several of the firemen, who shook him by the hand and told him what a brave act he had accomplished.

They wanted to know his name, and where he lived in Cherryville, and while he was trying to answer their questions, Mr. French came forward with his daughter on his arm and began to express his gratitude to the boy in no uncertain terms.

The firemen had by this time got several streams on the flames, and were working like good fellows to try and save as much of the house as was possible.

"What is your name, my boy?" Mr. French asked Tom.

"Tom Sheridan," he answered.

"Come with us, Sheridan. My daughter can't thank you here, and she is anxious to express her gratitude. My wife will want to thank you also."

Tom rather shrank from the gaze and plaudits of the crowd as they made their way to the automobile, where Mrs. French sat in a state of intense anxiety, although the crowd had informed her that her daughter had been saved, and she herself had had an indistinct view of the rescue.

Mrs. French sprang out of the vehicle and clasped her child to her heart, while the crowd cheered again.

Mr. French holding on to Tom, led his wife and daughter over to the residence of a neighbor on the other side of the street, where they were received with sympathy for their trouble and congratulations over the escape of Miss French.

Tom had already learned that the girl's name was Elsie, and now that he was able to get a look at her, he saw how pretty she was.

As soon as she got the chance she turned to Tom, and, with tears in her eyes, thanked him for what he had done for her.

"You're the bravest boy in the world," she exclaimed, regarding him with a look of interest and admiration. "I never will forget you as long as I live—never!" she added, emphatically.

It seemed a harder trial for Tom to muster suitable words to reply to her than it had been to save her from the fire.

He felt decidedly embarrassed in her presence, and before the others, for he was not accustomed to associate with people of their social standing.

Elsie perceived the state of his feelings, and tried in the most delicate way to put him at his ease.

In the end she succeeded, and Tom was sure she was the nicest girl he had ever met.

Tom explained that he did not live in Cherryville, but had merely come on business from a farm near Liberty.

He said he guessed it was time for him to start on his return, as it would take him some time to get back to his temporary home.

The Frenches, when they learned how far he had to go, would not hear of his going back that day, the afternoon being nearly spent.

"You must stay here till to-morrow morning at least," insisted Mr. French, and Tom finally yielded a reluctant consent to do so.

The family who had tendered hospitality to their burned-out neighbors were glad to include Tom for the night, at any rate, for they considered that his heroic conduct entitled him to every consideration at their hands.

So Tom became as one of them for the time being.

The fire was got under control by this time through the well-directed efforts of the local fire department, and the greater part of the dwelling was saved, though most everything of real value in the building was more or less injured by water and smoke.

However, the place and its contents were fully insured, and Mr. French was not likely to suffer a very large financial loss.

Elsie, after a time, took possession of Tom herself, and the two young people were soon on a most friendly footing.

By the time the fire was out the silvery tones of a bell announced that dinner was on the table, and all adjourned to the dining-room, where Tom's embarrassment returned in the presence of a table display to which he was unused.

However, he managed to get through the meal without making any mistakes that might not be readily excused, and it was with a feeling of great relief that he accompanied Elsie back to the porch, where they found that the crowd had entirely dispersed, and that the engines had departed, only a watchman from one of the companies remaining behind to guard the burned building.

CHAPTER VII.

TOM SECURES A FAIR AND INFLUENTIAL BACKER.

"Do you know it seems most remarkable to me that it should turn out to be my fortune to save you, Miss French," said Tom, as he and Elsie sat alone on the veranda after dinner. "If it had been any other girl it wouldn't have been so significant."

"I don't think I quite understand you, Mr. Sheridan," said Elsie, in some surprise.

"Then I guess I'll have to explain," he replied. "I came to Cherryville on business connected with a small steamboat called the *Elsie French*."

"The boat that was named after me?"

"I suppose she must have been, seeing that she bears your name, and your father is president of the company that owns her."

"The company does not own her. She belongs to me."

"Does she?" answered Tom, not a little astonished. "Why, I thought—"

"The company never owned her at all. She belonged to my father when he was the owner of the line that ran between Toledo and Fort Wayne. That was many years ago. When business increased so that the small boats were inadequate to the demands of the business my father formed the Maumee River Navigation Company. Three large steamers were built and put into commission, and the smaller ones my father sold; that is, all except the *Elsie French*, which was the very first boat he had built when I was an infant. He made her a present to me, and I have made quite a bit of pin money out of her since."

"So she really is your property?"

"She is really and truly all mine."

"Why, I came to Cherryville to see if she was for sale."

"Did you? Who wanted to buy her?"

"Well, no one wanted to buy her, Miss French, but I was thinking of getting a couple of people up my way to buy her, if I could induce them to go into a scheme I had formed to help them ship their products to the Toledo market by water."

"I am afraid that I wouldn't consent to sell the boat, Mr. Sheridan. Have you any objection to telling me what your scheme is? Of course, I don't want to pry into your business, so you needn't tell me if you don't want to."

"I'll tell you the whole thing, Miss French. I had a talk with the company's agent, and he told me that the boat was open to a charter for any length of time on satisfactory contract, so I thought that such an arrangement might be made to answer even better than if the boat had to be purchased, though, of course, it would be more expensive in the long run to the persons I am hoping to interest in my scheme."

"You have some transportation plan in view, then?" she said, with a look of interest.

"Yes. The general freight agent of the A. & T. branch of the P., Ft. W. & C. road has just notified shippers along the line of an advance in freight rates to take effect from the first of next month. This will hit several persons in our part of the county pretty bad, and from what I heard one of them say I am almost sure they would welcome a cheaper means of transportation to Toledo, even by water, if their products could be landed at the market in any sort of reasonable time. As the case stands, they have no way of reaching the boats of the Maumee River Navigation Company at this point, for their farms are twenty miles up the branch. Now, I thought if they could get a small steamer to bring their stuff down the branch to Cherryville, the Navigation Company would be able to transport the freight from here to Toledo."

"Of course, that could be done all right," replied Elsie.

Tom then told the girl that his object was to secure a good job out of the scheme that he called himself the originator of.

"If I only had money enough myself to start the enterprise I'd run it on my own hook as my own business and make money. Nothing would suit me better than to do that, for I am ambitious to get along in life on my own merits, and some day I will succeed in doing so," he added, with a determined nod of his head.

"Suppose that I was to let you have the use of the *Elsie French*, do you think you could run the business you have in mind, profitably?" asked the girl.

"Let me have the use of her?"

"Yes. You know that in saving my life you have done me a service I can never repay in full. I should like to express my obligation in some manner, however, that would be of

benefit to you. Now, I am very much interested in this scheme of yours to carry freight down the Maumee Branch to this town. You have just said that if you had money enough to go into it yourself you would be glad to do it, and that you think you could make money. Well, I want to help you carry out your ambitious views. You shall have the *Elsie French*, fully manned and equipped, just as I charter her, for six months or longer, if necessary, free of charge. Won't that give you the start you long for?"

"Miss French, you cannot mean that?" exclaimed Tom, almost bewildered by the proposal.

"I do mean it. Furthermore, I am sure my father will make special rates with you on all freight that you transfer to his steamers at this town for transportation to Toledo. He will be more than glad to do anything to help you make the business a success, for he will always be under obligations to you for what you did for me. You will do well to have a talk with him this evening on the subject. He will help you put the business in shape, for he is thoroughly familiar with all the details of transportation by water."

"Miss French, you are giving me the opportunity of my life. I am sure to succeed, provided, of course, that I can make a long contract with the two shippers in my neighborhood. But I cannot accept such liberal terms as you offer me. You will let me repay you out of the profits, won't you? I should feel more independent."

"But I don't want you to repay me, Mr. Sheridan," she said. "I want to do all this because it gives me the opportunity to express my gratitude to you in what my father would call a substantial manner."

"You are very kind to offer to put me on my feet in this business, but I would rather make the business pay everything. I think you will be doing all that I ought reasonably expect if you will simply give me a start by allowing me to get into your debt until I am able to turn myself."

"Perhaps you would agree to another proposal on my part. Would you accept me as a silent partner in your scheme. I will provide the steamer and cost of running her, you will provide the business to make her pay. We will form a company, say—you and I. You can be president and general manager, while I'll be the secretary. I think I should enjoy the sensation of being in business."

"Why, that would be just the thing!" cried Tom, with enthusiasm.

"I should want it understood, though, that it will, in the end, be your business. I am a girl, with a rich father, and consequently well provided for. You are a boy, who will soon be a man, with a future to make for yourself. I am going into this plan simply to help you. While I remain in the company I will be your partner, but when I retire from the arduous," she smiled, "duties of the secretaryship, the company will thereafter be wholly yourself, unless you care to take another partner."

"Anything you say goes, Miss French, though it is a mighty liberal arrangement for me. I will talk to your father about the matter as soon as I get the chance. Then I will call on the proprietors of Kenilworth and Ivanhoe farms and try to get them to give me their business on trial. Should they refuse to make a change from the railroad when it comes to a pinch, then the whole scheme will, as a matter of course, fall through, and I will have to think of something else in which to make a start in life."

They talked the matter over a while longer, both being intensely interested in it, and then Mr. French coming out, Elsie left Tom to open the subject to her father.

Tom laid the whole scheme before the president of the Maumee River Navigation Co. in a business-like way, and asked his advice on the subject.

He told the gentleman of his daughter's generous offer and asked him if it met with his approval.

Mr. French was very much interested in Tom's project.

He asked the boy many questions, and seemed to be much struck with his ambitious plans to start himself in business.

He said that he was very glad that Elsie had made the offer to him, and assured Tom that he could rely on his advice and assistance at any and all times.

"It is impossible that either of us can ever repay you even a small part of the obligation we are under to you, but it will give us a great deal of satisfaction to assist you in any way we can," said Mr. French. "This navigation project of yours naturally interests me, as it is the same business, on a limited scale, as that I have been in so long myself. I think you will be able to make it pay so far as your needs are concerned, and it will give you an education in the business that will be,

valuable to you hereafter. I will make you a special rate on all the freight you turn over to our company at this town, so as to increase your profits. Now, in order to help you to gain the confidence of these two shippers on whom you rely to put the business into running order, I will give you an official letter endorsing your plan and guaranteeing to see you through a year's contract. That will enable them to understand just where they are, if they sign an agreement for that time with you."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. French," replied Tom, gratefully. "That ought to fetch them, for Mr. Jones really only wants a good excuse to abandon the railroad."

Mr. French then proceeded to give Tom some good, practical advice on navigation matters, and other points that he would need to know if he embarked in the enterprise he was trying to push through.

"Let me know as soon as possible how things are coming, and by all means refer to me as your backer in the business when you find such a recommendation will be of assistance to you."

In the morning, after bidding Elsie and her mother good-by, Tom accompanied Mr. French to his office in the agent's building.

The general offices of the company were in Toledo, and there was an agent at all the towns along the river that the boats made a landing.

Mr. French went to Toledo about once a week, but transacted a good deal of the company's business at Cherryville.

Mr. French introduced Tom to the local agent, and then taking him into his own office wrote a strong letter supporting Tom's navigation plan, and guaranteeing to co-operate with him from Cherryville to Toledo.

He drew a schedule of rates from Liberty to Cherryville, and then added the company's rates from thence to Toledo.

"You can make that the basis of your charges and submit it to Messrs. Brown and Jones. As soon as you have signed a contract with them and are ready to go right ahead, I will let you know the rebate I will allow you on your freight from this point east."

After some further conversation Tom parted from Mr. French and started for Liberty, feeling like a bird.

CHAPTER VIII.

DISCUSSING THE PROJECT.

Tom built a great many air-castles on his way back to the Pennington farm, which he reached early in the afternoon.

The first thing he did was to hold an interview with Mr. Pennington.

He laid his transportation project before the farmer, showed him the letter he got from Mr. Sidney French, and asked him what he thought about the scheme.

Mr. Pennington was very much astonished.

"Why, Tom, I had no idea you were such a progressive boy," he said. "But how can you expect to run such a business when you have had no experience in it?"

"I'll run it all right, Mr. Pennington," replied Tom, confidently.

"You seem to have great confidence in yourself. But tell me how did you manage to interest Mr. French in the matter? His letter indicates his willingness to give you his unqualified support. In fact, he guarantees to see you through for a year at least. Such backing as that from a stranger is unprecedented in my experience."

"Well, I secured it through a most fortunate circumstance," answered Tom, who then described how he had saved the life of Elsie French at her burning home.

He explained to Mr. Pennington that his visit to Cherryville was wholly with a view to get information and rates to submit to Messrs. Brown and Jones, with the hope that they would take up the scheme themselves, in which event he expected to get a job on the boat.

His rescue of Miss French, however, had entirely altered his original idea, and put him in the position to start the business on his own hook under the most favorable conditions.

"I can understand now how the case stands," said the farmer. "You are a very fortunate boy in having secured so powerful a friend, for even should this scheme miss fire through the refusal of the two shippers to avail themselves of your offer to transport their products to Toledo by water, Mr. French is bound to provide well for your future in some other way."

"Now, Mr. Pennington, even if everything turns out favorably for me in my interview with Mr. Jones and Mr. Brown, I can do nothing without your help."

"How is that?" asked the farmer, in some surprise.

"Why, I must have a landing place or wharf in this vicinity where I can take freight. There are only two wharves suitable for this purpose. One is on Farmer Whipple's property, the other on yours. Of course, you will understand that the Whipple wharf is out of the question for me to consider. That farmer would about as soon cut his head off as to let me have the use of it."

Mr. Pennington nodded, with a half smile.

"So," continued Tom, "I must rely on you to let me use your wharf if I am to engage in the business. Then to reach the wharf you will have to concede the right-of-way through your lane from the road to the wharf. That is a more serious matter for you to consider, but I am prepared to pay you for the use of it, either in money or in transportation privileges, for I can carry your produce to Toledo at a less rate than the railroad charges even under its present schedule, which is to be superseded by a higher one on the first of next month, as you probably know."

"Don't worry, Tom. You shall have the use of both the wharf and the lane at a fair figure. In fact, I welcome the prospect of a boat up the branch. It would save me a lot of hauling over four miles of road to the station. To be able to ship my stuff direct to Toledo right from my own door is a great consideration to me, and is of itself easily worth the rent of the wharf privileges."

"Then you are willing to make a year's contract with me to that effect, are you, Mr. Pennington? And you will permit the right-of-way through your lane to any shipper that wishes to reach the wharf if I agree to pay you a reasonable compensation?"

"Yes, Tom," replied the farmer, whose admiration of the boy's energetic business ideas had expanded greatly since the commencement of their talk.

"Thank you, Mr. Pennington. This is very friendly on your part, and I shan't forget it, whether the scheme goes through or not."

"I sincerely trust it may go through, my lad. Your tact and perseverance surely out to succeed. At any rate, I will do all I can to help you reach the goal of your ambition."

"Then I shall start the ball rolling with the big shippers tomorrow morning. I am anxious to open negotiations with them before they commit themselves to the railroad for another year."

After supper Tom and Bob went down to the wharf, and then the former told his friend all that had happened to him in Cherryville, and how successfully his scheme had panned out so far.

Bob was as astonished as his father.

"Then you're going to start the business for yourself, run it yourself and capture all the profits."

"That's the idea exactly," replied Tom.

"You were certainly born for good luck. Did you carry a rabbit's foot in your pocket when you went to Cherryville yesterday morning?"

Tom laughed.

"I don't possess such an article," he answered.

"I guess you don't need one. A fellow who tumbles into such good fortune as you have done can give cards and spades to those who rely on rabbits' feet. Well, as soon as you start this steamboat on the branch you're going to give me a job, aren't you?"

"I'll be glad to do so if your father has no objections."

"I'll answer for him. What do you suppose I can do?"

"Well, you might be my chief assistant. You could take full charge of this wharf, receive all freight brought here for shipment, make out the waybills in duplicate, see that everything was properly loaded on the boat, for I will be responsible for any damage to freight after it once has been delivered at the wharf, and attend to such other matters as the local agent at this end will be expected to look after. Understand?"

"Sure," replied Bob, enthusiastically. "That job will just suit me, and I will attend to things right up to the queen's taste, see if I don't."

"I'll have to lease a wharf, or rather the right to use one in part, up at Liberty. I'm going to call my business the 'Liberty and Cherryville Transportation Company,' with the chief office at Liberty. The agent of the Maumee River Navigation Company at Cherryville will act as agent for me in that place, so Mr. French told me, which will give tone and importance to my venture."

"You can bet it will."

"And, let me tell you a secret, Bob, which you mustn't give away, Miss Elsie French is going to take a personal interest in the line, and will manage, in a general way, the Cherryville end."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Bob, with open mouth.

"Yes, she's enthusiastic over the idea of having something to do in connection with my scheme. The boat I'm going to use is her personal property, and she's going to furnish me with all the funds necessary to start the enterprise."

"Geewilkins!" ejaculated Bob. "Why, you've fallen into a regular butter-tub."

"Butter-tub or not, Bob, it's up to me to make good. I should feel like thirty cents if I failed after getting such a splendid start as I am assured of."

"Don't worry. You'll make good, all right. A fellow who can originate such a big scheme and push it through to a practical start is not going to slip up."

"I hope not; but the matter isn't settled yet by a long way. Everything depends on my being able to talk Mr. Jones and Mr. Brown into a regular contract."

"You ought to be able to do that with the backing you have. They can't lose, with Mr. French's guarantee behind the project."

"That's what I depend on, and I have very strong hopes of succeeding. I'll bet the freight agent of the A. & T. will have a fit if the Elsie French goes into commission between Liberty and Cherryville."

"I'll bet he will, too," grinned Bob. "He'll have several fits. You'll hear from him before you're long in business."

"Why should I hear from him? He won't be able to interfere with me."

"Of course he won't, but I'll bet the railroad will try to buy you off."

"The railroad company can't buy me off," replied Tom, with a resolute shake of his head.

"Then they'll try to make trouble for you."

"How?"

"I don't know how; but don't forget you'll be up against not alone the A. & T., but the powerful corporation of which the A. & T. is one of the feeders."

"You mean the P., Ft. W. & C.?"

"That's what I mean."

"Mr. French will see me through."

"He will if he can; but recollect there are a hundred millions or more back of that trunk line."

"Oh, I'll only take a mighty small bit of their trade away. A mere fleabite."

"Everything counts with a big railroad company."

"I don't care. They won't bulldoze me out of business, you can take your oath to that. I may be only a boy, but I'll fight for my rights just as strongly as if I was a millionaire."

"The railroad may cut rates on you."

"That won't hurt me much, for I'll have a contract for a year at least with the big shippers."

"That's something, of course."

"The shippers will understand, anyway, that the cut rates would only hold good until I was driven out of the business, then the company would get back at them with increased rates to make up its loss."

"That's right. They'd be fools to desert you, for it would cost them dearly in the end."

Tom and Bob then looked over the wharf.

"It won't be large enough, do you think?" said Bob.

"Yes, it will," replied Tom. "I'll arrange with your father for the lease of a portion of this ground here. I'll build a good-sized water-proof shed, with an office in it for you and your assistant, if you need one, as I fancy you will. All freight will be stored under cover that arrives here for the boat. I'll have hands enough aboard the boat to handle it expeditiously, so that there'll be no delay in loading up the moment the steamer hauls in."

"Shall you take passengers, too?"

"Sure. I'll carry anybody that wants to go by water from Liberty. It will be a pleasanter trip than by trolley, with the change at Carlyle, and five or six miles shorter as well."

"That will be fine. I'll bet you'll have a good many passengers if you don't charge too much."

"The fare by trolley is fifteen cents. I'll have to charge a quarter, but it will be worth it."

It was getting dark now, so the boys returned to the house, but they continued to discuss the subject that was nearest their hearts until they got into bed.

Next morning Mr. Pennington loaned Tom a light rig to visit the two shippers in business-like shape.

"I'll be on pins and needles till you get back with good news," said Bob, who accompanied him as far as the road. "I'm over head and ears interested in this scheme of yours, and I should feel awfully disappointed if it didn't go."

"Oh, I guess it will go all right," said Tom, as he started off.

"I'm just stuck on that job he's going to give me," said Bob to himself, as he watched his friend out of sight. "It hits me on my weak spot. It's several hundred times better than working about the farm. The boys will all be jealous of my good luck, while the girls—well, say, I'll be solid with them, then, bet your life."

CHAPTER IX

HOW TOM CAUGHT ON AND IS THEN ARRESTED.

Tom had no difficulty in securing an interview with Mr. Jones, whom he first visited, as the boy judged he would be the more easily influenced of the two shippers, and half the battle would be won if he succeeded in talking him over.

The proprietor of the Ivanhoe Dairy and Fruit Farm was greatly surprised when Tom broached the object of his call.

He listened with much interest as the boy laid the details of his scheme before him, and his interest assumed large proportions when Tom handed him Mr. French's letter and he read it over.

"There is my scale of charges on all your products delivered from the wharf on Mr. Pennington's property, which I have secured, to Toledo, via Cherryville, in five to six hours."

Mr. Jones examined the freight rates and noted that they showed an appreciable reduction from the present railroad charges.

"If you will sign a year's contract with me, Mr. Jones," said Tom, "I will have my part guaranteed by Mr. French, so that you will be sure that the agreement will be lived up to to the letter."

Mr. Jones was evidently much impressed by this.

He knew that Mr. French's endorsement would insure the carriage of his goods in good shape and on time.

"Have you spoken to Mr. Brown on this subject yet?" he asked.

"No, sir," replied Tom; "but I am going directly to his farm as soon as I leave you."

"When will you be ready to take freight?"

"On the first of the month."

Tom then told him that he had secured the right-of-way through Mr. Pennington's lane to the wharf on the branch.

He said that he would start at once to put up a first-class freight shed at the wharf for the temporary storage of freight pending the arrival of the boat.

The Elsie French, he said, would make connection with both the early morning boat at Cherryville from Fort Wayne, and the late night-boat for Toledo.

"That will enable you by shipping fruit in the season from my wharf at five o'clock to connect with the Toledo market at daylight, same as you have been doing by the night freight, and you would save the long haul to the station, ten miles from here."

"That is a big object, certainly," replied Mr. Jones.

"My rates are much lower than the railroad's."

"That's true, too."

"Then on the first of the month the railroad rates will be advanced."

Mr. Jones nodded.

"Well," he said, "go over and have a talk with Mr. Brown, and see how he takes to your offer, then come back here and I will give you my answer, which I will consider in the meantime."

"Very well. If Mr. Brown asks me what your views are on it, shall I say that you consider them in a favorable light?"

"Yes. You can tell him that I like the idea immensely, and am inclined to sign a contract guaranteed by the president of the Navigation Company."

Tom then drove over to the Kenilworth Farm and interviewed Mr. Brown.

He had a long and interesting conversation with that gentleman.

"Bring me a contract, embodying the following points which I shall insist on, endorsed by Mr. Sidney French, and I will sign it. Remember, you must be prepared to accept freight on

the first day of next month," was Mr. Brown's decision, which was quite satisfactory to Tom, who then returned to Mr. Jones.

Tom repeated a portion of the talk he had had with Mr. Brown, and announced his decision.

"Very well," said Mr. Jones. "Bring me a contract containing the following insertions, guaranteed by Mr. French, and I will sign it, the contract positively to go into effect on the first of next month."

"All right," replied Tom. "I will have the contracts here inside of two days."

Mr. Jones invited him to dinner, as it was a little after noon, and Tom accepted the invitation.

After the meal he called on another shipper, not so important as the other two, and succeeded in securing him also for a customer.

"My business is as good as started now," Tom congratulated himself on the road back to the Pennington farm. "The Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Company will soon be an accomplished fact, and the steamboat Elsie French will presently make the water fly twice a day up and down the branch. I wonder what Farmer Whipple and his son Ezra will say when they hear that I'm at the head of the new concern? Will they have a fit? Well, say, they'll turn green with rage. If Mr. Whipple wants to get his produce to the Toledo market at low rates he'll have to see me."

Tom felt about as good as any boy can well feel as he drove along the road.

As he approached a cross-road a buggy, with a boy in it, came up the other road.

Both rigs came together at the crossing, and the other boy, who proved to be Ezra Whipple, whipped up his animal and tried to get ahead.

He only succeeded in getting his wheel locked with Tom's forward one, and both vehicles came to a standstill.

"What do you want to get in my way for?" snarled Ezra, recognizing Tom.

"I rather think it was you who got in my way," replied Tom, pleasantly.

"You lie, Tom Sheridan! It was your fault," snorted Ezra.

"All right; let it go at that," replied Tom. "Let's unlock."

"Back your wagon, then," returned Ezra, who thought he had won his point.

"That won't do any good. Back yours a bit so I can go ahead."

"I won't do no such thing. Do you s'pose I'm going to let you get ahead of me on the road?"

"I don't see how you can help yourself the way things are."

"I can help it. Back your wagon."

"I can't back without carrying your wheel with me. You must be a fool if you can't see that," replied Tom, impatiently.

"Do you mean to call me a fool, you beggar!" roared Ezra, furiously.

"You are acting like one, Ezra Whipple. And I want you to understand that I am no more a beggar than you are," added Tom, angrily.

"How dare you call me a beggar!"

"I didn't call you one."

"Yes, you did."

"Are you going to back your wheel away from mine?"

"No, I'm not."

"Then I'm going ahead and you can take the consequences. Get up, Mollie."

"Are you going to upset me?"

"That's your lookout. Whoa, girl! I'll give you another chance to draw out."

"Back your wagon," insisted Ezra, in a dominating tone.

"Look here, Ezra Whipple, if I was to do as you say I might snap your wheel off. If you will back there is room enough for you to get clear."

"I'm not goin' to take no orders from you," replied Ezra, sulkily.

"All right. It's your funeral. Go on, Mollie."

Mollie stepped out, carrying the front wheel clear, but Tom's rear wheel caught the buggy in such a way as to shove it toward the ditch and lift it up on that side as well.

The consequence was that Ezra was spilled out into the bushes, while Tom drove on, leaving his enemy to pick himself up.

His buggy was scratched and the front wheel wrenched.

"I'll make you pay for this, Tom Sheridan," he cried, shaking his fist after the retreating wagon. "My father will have you arrested and sent to the lock-up. Ugh! How I hate you!"

He got into his buggy after getting it out of the ditch and resumed his way, nursing a lot of revengeful thoughts against the boy he disliked.

"Well, Tom, what luck?" asked Bob, when his friend drove into the yard.

"First-class. Brown, Jones and Robinson are going to sign a year's contract each."

"Hurrah!" cried Bob, throwing his cap into the air. "Three cheers for the Liberty and Cherryville Transportation Company."

Tom told him all the particulars of his visits to the three shippers, and Bob was tickled to death that things were coming out the way he wanted them to.

Mr. Pennington was also pleased to learn of Tom's success, and said there was nothing now to prevent him from going ahead.

"And I'm going right ahead, Mr. Pennington. I shall make my application to-morrow to the Liberty Town Council for wharfage rights on the river front."

"You'll get what you want, for it will be of public benefit for you to run a steamboat up and down the branch from Liberty to Cherryville."

"That's the way I figure it," replied Tom.

After supper that evening Tom told Bob about his unexpected meeting with his late aunt's husband in Cherryville at the scene of the fire.

"He and that other chap had evidently robbed the house, and I guess they accidentally set the place on fire while doing it. Bagley has developed into a full-fledged criminal, and his finish will come pretty soon."

Of course Bob was surprised to hear that news.

"You didn't tell me about this yesterday," he said.

"No, I hadn't decided whether I'd say anything about it or not, but I don't mind telling you now. Keep it mum."

Bob promised that he would.

"By the way, Bob, I had a run-in with Ezra Whipple on the road this afternoon."

"Did you? What about?"

Tom told his story of how he and Ezra had met at the cross-road, and got mixed up through Ezra's stubbornness in trying to pass him at the wrong moment.

"And you dumped him into the ditch, did you?" chuckled Bob.

"I couldn't help doing it. I wasn't going to stay there all day just because he chose to be ugly and wouldn't do the right thing."

"You served him right. It's a wonder he wouldn't take a tumble."

At that moment a man drove into the yard in a light wagon. Mr. Pennington went to meet him as he alighted.

The farmer recognized him as one of the town officers.

"How do you do, Mr. Pennington," he said. "I want to see a boy named Tom Sheridan who is stopping with you."

"There he is yonder with my son," said Mr. Pennington, wondering what the officer wanted with Tom.

They both approached the boys.

"I believe you are Tom Sheridan?" said the officer, addressing Tom.

"That's my name."

"You will have to go to town with me."

"What for?"

"I have a warrant for your arrest."

"My arrest!" gasped Tom.

"There must be some mistake," said the farmer. "What is the charge?"

"Assault on Ezra Whipple. He swore out the complaint with his father."

Mr. Pennington looked astonished.

"Do you know anything about this, Tom?" he asked.

Tom explained what had happened in the road.

"Why, this charge is ridiculous," said Mr. Pennington.

"Well, that is for the magistrate to pass on," said the officer. "I must do my duty."

"Their object evidently is to keep me in prison overnight," said Tom, indignantly.

"They shan't succeed," said the farmer. "I'll go with you and bail you out."

Accordingly, Mr. Pennington accompanied the officer and Tom to the village.

The officer consented to drive to the magistrate's home, who, after hearing the boy's story, paroled him in the farmer's custody until ten o'clock on the following morning.

CHAPTER X.

GETTING INTO SHAPE TO START OPERATIONS.

Next morning, a little before ten, Mr. Pennington, Tom and Bob drove up to the magistrate's office, where they found Ezra Whipple and his father already on hand to press the complaint against the boy they both hated.

Tom was turned over to the custody of the officer and proceedings began.

The charge was read to him and Tom pleaded "Not guilty." Ezra was then sworn and stated the case as he viewed it.

He also started to tell how Tom had knocked him down in the road and also had insulted his father when he came over to borrow the harness tool, but the magistrate cut him short, and told him to stick to the facts of the case in hand.

Tom asked permission to cross-examine him, and was accorded the privilege.

Questioning Ezra closely, he compelled him to admit facts so damaging to his story that the magistrate threw the case out and discharged Tom from custody.

Ephraim Whipple and his son withdrew, much disgruntled over the magistrate's decision, while Tom received the congratulations of his friends.

As soon as possible he took a car for Carlyle, where he changed for Cherryville.

On his arrival in that town he found Mr. French at his office.

The president of the Navigation Company was pleased to see him back so soon, and asked him what luck he had had with his scheme.

"I've caught the shippers, sir, and they are ready to sign contracts, provided you will guarantee them."

"I'm ready to do that, my lad."

"Here are the special points each wants inserted in his agreement. You can look them over, and if satisfactory I shall want you to have three contracts drawn up in duplicate. Also an agreement with Mr. Pennington, covering the right-of-way through his property and the wharf privilege."

Tom then went into the details of his plans, which included the shed for freight at Pennington Landing, as he intended calling it, the leasing of part of a wharf at Liberty, and other matters of importance to the new freight line.

He remained overnight at Cherryville, and when he left next morning he carried with him the contracts, and a sum of money sufficient to start the ball rolling.

He reached Liberty in time to attend a regular meeting of the Town Council, and put in his request for the wharf privilege that he required.

His statement that a freight and passenger steamboat was about to be put into commission between Cherryville and Liberty created considerable excitement in the Council room.

He received the assurance of the members of the board that his request would be granted on very easy terms.

Next morning the tri-weekly paper announced that the "Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Company" would run a boat between the two places, beginning on the first of the month.

The publication of the paragraph aroused a good deal of interest in the village, and many of the citizens were of the opinion that it would give Liberty a boom.

That day Tom presented the contracts in turn to the three shippers, and they accepted and signed them.

Then he got an estimate for the shed from a village carpenter, after he had obtained a lease of the necessary ground from Mr. Pennington, and on the day following work was begun on the building.

As soon as he concluded arrangements with the Town Council he had a small shed put up at the head of the wharf, and divided into a ticket and freight office, and a reception-room for passengers.

The printing of tickets, freight waybills and other stationery was prepared for him at Cherryville by an employee of the Navigation Company, and Tom spent a portion of his time in that town in being coached in all matters connected with the business that it was necessary for him to know.

All printed matter bore the name of the new transportation company, and the office stationery in addition carried Tom's name as general manager.

Tom was introduced to the pilot-captain of the *Elsie French*, who was instructed to look to the boy for his instructions in future.

Bob Pennington having received permission from his father

to accept the position of agent for the new transportation company at Pennington Landing, was instructed in his duties by Tom, who also hired a young and bright acquaintance to fill a similar position at Liberty.

Handbills containing the following announcement were circulated in Liberty and throughout the neighborhood:

LIBERTY & CHERRYVILLE TRANSPORTATION CO.
Thomas Sheridan, General Manager.

On and after May 1 the Steamer *Elsie French* will make two trips daily (Sunday excepted) between Liberty and Cherryville, connecting with the fast, palatial steamers of the Maumee River Navigation Co. at Cherryville for all points east and west on the Maumee River, leaving Liberty at 7 a. m. and 5 p. m. Passenger fare to Cherryville, 25 cents. Excursion, 40 cents. Freight received at Meiggs' Wharf, Liberty, and at Pennington Landing (Pennington Farm). For rates apply to agent at either wharf. Office of company in Liberty, 119 Main street.

A standing advertisement was also inserted in the Liberty and Cherryville newspapers after a similar fashion.

Bob saw to it that a bunch of handbills were dumped into Farmer Whipple's front yard after dark one night, and Ezra found them next morning.

He started to read one.

"Thomas Sheridan, general manager," he muttered. "Same name as that beggar over at Pennington's."

Then he read on and presently came to "Pennington Landing (Pennington Farm)."

He rushed into the house to find his father.

"Say, dad," he cried, excitedly, "there's a new steamboat line on the Maumee Branch."

"Who says so?" growled the farmer.

"This circular says so. And what do you suppose, one of the landings is at Pennington's wharf."

"What!" roared Farmer Whipple. "Let me see that handbill."

He also paused a moment at "Thomas Sheridan, general manager."

He did not, of course, connect the name with the boy Tom whom he hated, but put it down as a coincidence.

What interested him the most was that this new company had established a landing at Pennington's wharf.

It made him as mad as a hatter to think that his own wharf should have been overlooked when the selection was made.

He figured that Mr. Pennington would make a good thing out of it, and he felt that he ought to have had this good thing himself.

He was jealous of Farmer Pennington's prosperity, although he had no cause to kick about his own, and this extra slice of luck going to his neighbor in place of coming to himself, galled him terribly.

He determined to go to the company's office and see if he couldn't make a deal to have the steamboat landing transferred to his property.

In order to do Pennington out of it, he was willing to give the company the use of his wharf free for six months.

With that resolve in his mind he harnessed up his buggy and drove into Liberty about eleven o'clock.

He stopped in front of 119 Main street, where a new gold sign pointed the way to the offices of the new company.

It happened that Bob and Tom were both there at the time, making the final arrangements for the beginning of business on the following Monday.

They were in the private office, the outer room being presided over by a small office boy.

"Is Mr. Thomas Sheridan, manager of the steamboat line, here?" asked Farmer Whipple on entering the outer office.

"Yes, sir. Do you want to see him?"

"I do."

"What is your name?"

"Ephraim Whipple."

The office boy entered the private room and told Tom that a man named Ephraim Whipple wanted to see him.

Tom and Bob looked at each other in astonishment.

"What the deuce does he want with you?" asked Bob.

"I give it up," replied Tom. Then turning to his office boy, he told him to ask Mr. Whipple to walk in.

CHAPTER XI.

OPENING OF THE NEW FREIGHT LINE.

Ephraim Whipple walked into the inner office as if he considered himself the most important man in the county, and he really did.

When his eyes rested on Tom seated at his desk, and Bob by his side, he stopped short and stared, while a hard look came over his features.

"I wish to see the manager," he said, aggressively, intensely disgusted to find that Tom appeared to be attached to the office.

"I am the manager, Mr. Whipple," replied Tom, politely.

"You the manager!" snorted the farmer, angrily. "How dare you tell me such a lie!"

"I am not telling you a lie, sir. I am the general manager of the Liberty & Cherryville Transportation Company. What can I do for you?"

Tom spoke with the dignity that he felt his position as the head of the company called for, and also with studied politeness.

Farmer Whipple seemed to be thoroughly staggered by his statement.

To his eyes it seemed so ridiculously improbable that he couldn't bring himself to believe it.

He stood and glared in a most unfriendly manner at the boy, while Tom waited for him to speak.

"I don't believe such a preposterous statement," he replied at length. "I came here to see the manager of this steamboat line and not to see you."

"Well, Mr. Whipple, I can only repeat what I have just told you—that I am the manager of the steamboat company. I can't help it if you don't believe me. You had better go out and make a few inquiries in order to satisfy yourself. Then I shall be glad to know the errand that brought you here. If it simply refers to the matter of shipping your produce to Cherryville, or Toledo, I will refer you to Robert Pennington, here, who is agent for the company at Pennington Landing. He will be pleased to give you all the necessary information. You will find our rates much lower than those of the railroad, and we guarantee to land your stuff in Toledo via the Maumee River Navigation Company's boats within six hours from the time our boats leave this end of the route."

"May I ask, is this new steamboat line run by boys?" asked the farmer, sarcastically.

"Well, sir, I am running it, and I am a boy, it is true, but I can guarantee thorough satisfaction to shippers. At any rate, Mr. Arthur Brown, of the Kenilworth Farm; Mr. Hiram Jones, of the Ivanhoe Farm, and Mr. Robinson, of the Robinson Farm, have confidence enough in the new line to warrant their signing a year's contract for the carriage of all their products to Toledo. Those three gentlemen, as you well know, are the largest shippers in this part of the county, and would not be likely to break away from the railroad without good and sufficient reason."

"Huh!" replied Farmer Whipple, wiping his brow with his bandana handkerchief. "They must be crazy to take any stock in a common boy like you. I certainly shall call on them and let them know a few things about you that they probably are not aware of."

"You are at liberty to do so, Mr. Whipple," answered Tom; "but I don't believe you will make anything by it. My business with those gentlemen is purely on a business basis. I might also inform you that this steamboat line is backed by the president of the Maumee River Navigation Company, and he guarantees all shipments made from up the branch."

"Well, if you are the manager of this line I don't want anything to do with it."

With those words, Farmer Whipple turned on his heel and strode out of the room, and thence out of the building.

He was not only disgusted, but very angry.

The very idea that such a boy as Tom Sheridan should have the management of a transportation line, even such a short one as between Liberty and Cherryville, fairly nauseated him.

He couldn't understand it, and what he couldn't understand he had no faith in.

He rode straight back home in a very ugly mood, and for the rest of the day made Ezra walk a chalk line, which did not please that young man for a cent.

On the afternoon of the 30th of April, the steamer Elsie French steamed up the branch and made fast to the wharf at Liberty.

Quite a crowd of curiously disposed people came down to the dock to look at her.

She was a small boat, but a good one in her way.

Having been used for some years merely as a chartered passenger boat, chiefly to take out excursion parties up and down the Maumee River, her cabin appointments were of an up-to-date and attractive order.

Miss French had hired, through her father's agent, a couple of extra deck hands to handle the freight expeditiously.

The pilot-captain brought his family and his belongings up on the boat, and had them moved into a cottage he had already rented in Liberty.

The rest of the men were to eat and sleep on board, and a cook was provided to look after them.

There was a small amount of freight delivered late that afternoon on Meiggs' Wharf for transportation to Cherryville, and this was put on board at once.

Mr. Pennington, Tom and quite a bunch of his young friends were on hand next morning to make the first trip on the boat to Cherryville.

There were also nearly a dozen of the villagers who bought tickets for the initial sail down the branch.

Promptly on time the little steamer, with a display of bunting, and a tooting of her whistle, pulled out from the wharf and headed down the river for Pennington Landing, where considerable freight awaited her.

She was followed by the cheers of a good-natured and enthusiastic crowd, who wished the new line all success.

Bob was on the wharf in a new steamboat cap, with the word "agent" in gold letters printed on a blue band, as the Elsie French approached the landing.

He felt as big and as important as though he was the chief counsellor of the village.

The steamboat ran alongside the little wharf and made fast.

Then the deckhands got busy with their trucks, and the freight was soon whisked on board.

As soon as the last load had passed over the gangplank, the whistle tooted its warning note, the lines were cast off, and the Elsie French steamed off down the stream and soon disappeared around a bend in the river.

It took one hour and fifty minutes to make the run from Liberty to Cherryville.

Miss French, her father, and a crowd of townspeople were on the Navigation Co.'s wharf to greet the arrival of the little boat on her first trip.

She was received with cheers and the lively strains of the Cherryville Cornet Band.

Everybody aboard was glad he had come, and all were invited to a light collation spread in the Navigation Company's passenger reception-room.

The freight was hardly on the dock before the morning boat down the river came in sight.

She was soon made fast alongside the dock, and her hands bundled the Elsie French's freight aboard in short order.

A few passengers from Cherryville, bound for Toledo, went aboard and then she hauled out and continued her trip eastward.

Everybody who had come down on the Elsie French returned to Liberty on her when she started back at two o'clock.

Tom was in high feather, for his business had opened in a small blaze of glory.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BOX OF MONEY.

Ezra was standing on his father's wharf when the steamboat left Pennington Landing and passed up toward Liberty at about fifteen minutes of four.

He gazed enviously at the boat and the figure of Tom Sheridan outside the pilot-house, for he knew well enough now that the "beggar" was running the line.

It was as much a mystery to him as it was to his father how Tom had secured such a fine opening for his talents; not that Ezra was willing to admit that Tom had any ability at all.

He was far too prejudiced against Sheridan to acknowledge what everybody else admitted that Tom was an uncommonly smart boy.

As the proof of the pudding is in the eating, Tom was demonstrating by his actions what was really in him.

"The idea of him, a poor boy, being made manager of a steamboat line," he muttered, discontentedly, for neither he nor his father had the remotest idea that Tom was really the originator and owner of the new transportation business. "I don't see how he came to get the job. However, he's bound to run it into the ground in no time at all—that's some satisfaction, and then a man will be put in his place. My father must have been awful slow not to get the landing established at his wharf. Then I could have been the agent here, like Bob Pennington is now. Of course, he got it because the company took his father's wharf. He's bound to put on airs

now, and try to lord it over me and the rest of the fellows. I s'pose he thinks he looks awfully big in that new cap with the gold letters on the band. He makes me sick."

The steamboat having passed out of view by this time, Ezra kicked a piece of wood into the river to relieve his feelings, and then sauntered back to the house, feeling as if he'd like to punch Bob's head because he was so fortunate.

The sudden cessation of shipments from the Ivanhoe, Kenilworth and Robinson farms, as well as the knowledge that a steamboat had been put on the branch to carry freight from Liberty to Cherryville, caused the freight agent of the A. & T. Railroad to sit up and take notice.

He lost no time sending a representative to call on Messrs. Brown, Jones and Robinson to see what was the matter.

The company's man found out what was the matter, all right—that the shippers objected to paying the new freight rate, first of all, and that they found the short haul to Pennington Landing much more convenient and profitable to them than the long one to the station beyond Liberty.

The result was that the agent notified the owners of the farms in question that he would grant them a rebate on the new schedule that would bring the rate below even the old one.

The three shippers replied that they had signed a contract with the steamboat manager for a year, and they could not make a change within that time as long as the terms of the agreement was kept by the transportation company.

Tom, in the meantime, called on all the farmers who had anything to send to market, and solicited their custom, pointing out that Cherryville and Riverport, five miles further down, were good marts for the sale of their products.

As he offered satisfactory rates, he picked up a good bit of custom in this way, and the company's books at the end of the first month showed good results.

The business was paying from the very start, and Elsie congratulated Tom on the excellent showing that he was making.

Bob was pulling through in great shape, and was holding his end up without any trouble.

Tom went to Cherryville two and three times a week, and he never failed to call on Elsie, not alone to talk business with her, but also for the pleasure of meeting her.

The young people showed an increasing partiality for each other's company as time passed, and neither was quite so happy as when they were together.

Mr. French's house had been practically rebuilt since the fire, and it was there that the girl received the young steamboat lad, whom she was proud to call her partner.

He always stayed to one meal, sometimes two, and was a great favorite with Mr. and Mrs. French, who felt they never could do too much for the boy who had saved the life of their only daughter.

In this way two months and a half passed away and Tom found that his business was panning out better and better each week.

One July afternoon both Tom and Bob went to Cherryville on the five o'clock boat.

This was the trip they carried the bulk of the day's freight on the steamboat.

Tom had business with the Navigation Company's agent and did not go to the French residence.

In fact, he had barely time in which to do his business, as the boat only remained one hour in Cherryville, as she was due back at Liberty at ten.

It had been a very hot day, and soon after the Elsie French made fast to her berth at Cherryville, which she reached at seven, there were indications in the sky of an approaching thunderstorm.

As the time drew near for her to leave, the heavens were almost covered by the storm clouds.

From the brilliancy of the lightning and the loudness of the thunder, as the electric clouds came charging over the town, the storm promised to be a corker while it lasted.

Five minutes before starting-time Tom was surprised to see Mr. French step on board the steamer, accompanied by a well-dressed man, who was a stranger to him.

"Tom," said Mr. French, "this is Mr. Parker. He is the cashier of the Cherryville Bank."

Tom bowed to the gentleman, and then Mr. French continued:

"Mr. Parker wishes to send the sum of \$15,000 in gold to the Liberty Bank, and I have assured him that you will take charge of it and deliver it in safety, so that there will be no occasion for him to send a special messenger with it. I will,

of course, be responsible for the money, so I shall expect you to take unusual care of it."

"I shall certainly do that, sir," replied Tom, who appreciated the responsibility about to devolve upon him. "Both Bob and I will keep the money in sight until we deliver it to the cashier of the Liberty Bank."

"The gold is at the agent's office in charge of a messenger," said Mr. Parker. "I will have it sent aboard at once. Where shall you put it?"

"There is a little office on the cabin deck. I shall keep it there, and Bob Pennington or myself will stand guard over it all the way up the branch."

"When do you start?"

"Just as soon as your messenger brings the money aboard."

"You're going to have a rough trip, at least part of the way, Mr. Sheridan," remarked the cashier of the Cherryville Bank, as a terrific clap of thunder sounded almost immediately overhead and the sky was lit up by a vivid flash of lightning.

"Looks like it," answered Tom, as they stepped ashore on to the wharf. "I will wait here at the gangplank for your messenger."

In a few minutes the messenger appeared, bearing a heavy box on his shoulder.

"It is already received for," he said, delivering it to Tom.

"All right," replied the young steamboat magnate. "Cast off, Captain Ford," to the pilot, who was waiting for orders. "Follow me, Bob," he said to Pennington.

As the steamboat swung away from the wharf, amid the crashing of the elements, the two boys walked up the brass-bound stairs to the cabin floor.

No one had noticed in the darkness that two men had sneaked aboard the steamer, forward, and crouched down under the tarpaulin that protected some cases of freight billed for Liberty.

But such was the fact, and they were there for no good purpose.

"This is the most valuable freight we've carried yet," said Tom, as he opened the door of the small room that the pilot used as a storeroom and office.

"I should think it is," replied Bob. "While I don't believe there is much danger of our being relieved of it, as nobody but Mr. French, the bank cashier and his messenger knows that a box of money is aboard, one of us, as you told Mr. Parker, must keep a constant watch over it."

"You can bet your life on that. I'm not taking any chances with it. If I lost it I'd lose my reputation with it and then I might just as well throw up my hands. The pilot has a revolver. I'm going to borrow it."

Tom locked the door on the box of gold and put the key in his pocket.

"You sit down here and watch that door, Bob, while I get the gun," he said to his companion.

Bob took the seat and Tom went up to the pilot-house.

He was back in a very few minutes with the pilot's revolver in his pocket.

Then he took his seat beside Bob, and one or the other of them had his eyes on the door all the time.

The fierce wind that accompanied the thunderstorm swooped down on the little steamboat, and she rocked about as if at the mercy of a heavy sea.

The thunder roared overhead at frequent intervals, and the lightning flashed almost incessantly.

The storm continued at its height for perhaps twenty minutes, during which the rain came down in a perfect deluge.

The boys could hear it thundering upon the deck above their heads.

Then the worst of it passed away to the northwest, but the darkness remained intense, not a star being visible in the sky.

The pilot had to feel his way up the branch, and watch out sharp that he didn't get the boat aground at any of the turns in the stream, of which there were several.

The result was that the steamer reached Pennington Landing an hour late.

"You'll have to go on with me to Liberty to-night, Bob, on account of the money," said Tom.

"All right, old man, I'm with you. I'll have to open up the freight shed so the men can put those empty crates inside. I'll tell Mr. Ford to wait for me."

"You'll find me here when you get back," answered Tom.

So Bob hurried away to attend to business while Tom remained on guard.

Tom took the key from his pocket, unlocked the door and looked into the little room.

It was very dark, so he struck a match and flashed it around.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "Where is the box?"

It was clearly not where he had placed it.

He was about to look around on the floor when he noticed that the shutters of the single window were broken open and the sash swung inward.

"Great Scott! The box has been stolen!"

CHAPTER XIII.

PURSUIT OF THE THIEVES.

Tom was completely staggered by the loss of the box of money.

Tom went to the opening of the window and looked out.

Only a narrow six-inch projecting plank extended along the side of the boat under the window.

It seemed impossible that one man could have entered the room and got the heavy box out of the window with any success at all unless he had provided himself with a rope to lower it to the narrow space of deck below, between the railing and the side of the steamer.

He must have had an accomplice.

But who were the thieves?

Were two or more of the deckhands implicated in the robbery?

As he was about to leave the window he cast his eyes toward the stern of the steamer.

There in the gloom he saw the indistinct forms of two men.

All hands were busily engaged in putting ashore the crates and wheeling them into the barn, so these men could not belong to the boat.

Tom had only brought up one passenger, who he had just noticed reading a paper in the cabin.

Who, then, could these men be?

One of them stepped across on to the stringpiece of the wharf.

The other stood against the rail apparently holding something in his arms.

The man on the dock reached out his arms and the other handed him something that seemed to be quite heavy.

As soon as he got it in his arms he started off in the gloom, followed by the other, who had immediately sprung on the wharf.

"Those are the thieves!" palpitated Tom. "Whoever they be they are certainly the men who have stolen the gold and are now carrying it away under cover of the gloom. I haven't a moment to lose if I hope to recover the money. I must follow them and shoot them both if they refuse to give up the box. They won't be able to go very fast with that load, but the trouble will be to track them across the farm in the darkness. They will probably make for the woods yonder first, and then the road, hoping that the robbery may not be discovered until the steamer reaches Liberty. That would give them a good start and plenty of time to arrange their future movements. It's mighty lucky that I looked out this window at the critical moment."

Tom rushed out of the little room, flew down the stairs and dashed on to the wharf.

He found Bob just locking the shed door.

"What's the matter, Tom? You look excited," he said, rather surprised that his companion had deserted his post before the door of the room in which he supposed the box of money still lay.

"Come with me at once. The money-box has been stolen and we must recover it."

"Stolen!" gasped Bob, in utter amazement. "You can't mean that?"

"I do mean it. We haven't a moment to lose."

"Why, how—"

"Don't ask any questions now. Wait here till I tell Mr. Ford to go ahead."

The pilot-captain was standing near the wheel-house, waiting for Bob's signal, and two hands held the gangplank partly drawn in, while a man stood forward and another aft, ready to cast off the ropes.

"All right, cap'n," said Tom. "Go ahead. Bob and I are not going any further."

Mr. Ford at once gave orders to cast off from the wharf, and the steamboat was soon sailing along her final stretch.

"Come, Bob, follow me!" said Tom, starting off toward the

line of woods as fast as he could go, followed by the greatly bewildered Bob.

Inside of ten minutes they reached the outskirts of the woods.

"Keep your eyes skinned for two men, one of them carrying the box," said Tom, hurriedly.

They stood and listened, but no sound met their ears except the distant peals of thunder and the rustling of the trees in the night wind.

Finally Tom, satisfied that the two men had already entered the wood, if he had calculated their line of retreat aright, led the way in among the trees.

Tom carried a heavy heart, for unless he was able to recover the gold he dreaded the interview he would have to hold with Mr. French over the 'phone in the morning.

The president of the Navigation Company would, of course, make the bank's loss good at once, but the theft would be sure to leak out, and it was bound to hurt the reputation of the new line as a trustworthy public carrier of valuable property.

Tom set great store by the success of the transportation company he had established, and it certainly was hard luck to have such a terrible thing happen during the first three months especially.

"What will Elsie think of me?" he muttered, between his teeth.

To lose her good opinion he felt would almost break his heart.

He not only admired the fair girl, but was beginning to entertain a very strong feeling of regard for her, which every meeting between them deepened.

The very fact that he had been instrumental in saving her life made his growing attachment for her warmer.

"They may have gone towards that old hut on our property, which covers a kind of cellar where we once stored our crop of ice," said Bob, as they approached the other side of the woods.

"True, they might. But as they are probably strangers in this neighborhood they will hardly strike it except by accident."

"You are sure they are strangers, then?"

"No, I am not sure of it. I could not tell who they were in the darkness."

"It's funny, but I only noticed that we had one passenger up to-night."

"That was my idea, too. They certainly did not come into the cabin at any time or we would have noticed them."

"They must have stayed below on the freight deck, in which case some of the deckhands certainly saw them there, and Mr. Ford must have taken their tickets, so that if we fail to overhaul them we will be able to get their description to furnish to the police of all the towns around. What mystifies me is how they got into that room and got away with so heavy a box right under our noses. They certainly did not enter by the door, I can swear to that."

"No, they broke in through the window on the outside of the boat."

By this time they were drawing near the ice-house.

Suddenly, through one of the cracks of the building, they saw a flash of light as if a match had been struck.

From the intermittent way the blaze came and went, the boys judged that some one was lighting his pipe.

CHAPTER XIV.

RECOVERY OF THE BOX OF MONEY AND CAPTURE OF THE THIEVES.

Lying close to the ground in the wet grass the boys heard two men talking inside the hut.

The tones of one of them was somewhat familiar to Tom, and he wondered where he had heard it before.

He soon found out all about it, and the discovery was not a pleasant one.

The men were smoking and talking.

"Fifteen thousand dollars in gold is a pretty tough load for a man to carry, Bagley," said one of the pair, and at the mention of the name Tom gripped Bob by the arm.

His late aunt's husband was one of the thieves, and the other was probably the fellow Tom met in Bagley's company at the kitchen doorway of the French house at the time of the fire.

"It is a heavy load, Johnson," replied Bagley; "but I don't mind how tough it is to carry if we only get away with it."

"We'll get away with it all right, don't you fret," answered his companion, in a confident tone. "They haven't more than discovered its loss by this time; that will give us time enough to reach the Crossings, where you are known. We'll hire a room for the night, like any respectable person. Then we'll break open the box, divide the swag and make a bundle apiece of our shares. That will make it easy to carry. We will then let ourselves out of the house by the window of the room, make for Stanton and catch the through freight for Toledo, that gets there at four. We ought to reach the city by eight o'clock at the outside. Then we can take a boat for Buffalo, and a train from there to New York. Once in the metropolis we'll enjoy real life, and \$7,500 apiece will go a long way toward the article."

"The telegraph may head us off at Toledo," ventured Bagley.

"I hardly think it will bring detectives to the A. & T. freight yards. If we think it best, we can drop off outside the city limits and walk to the steamboat dock by a roundabout way."

"I leave the matter to you, Johnson. You know the ropes better than me."

"Yes, I guess I know a thing or two about hoodwinking the sleuths. This won't be the first time I've done it. This has been a mighty good haul for us, Bagley, and unexpected at that. Your nephew nearly got us pinched that day in Cherryville. This is where we've got back at him for it. He'll get into all kinds of trouble over the loss of this money."

"Serves him right, the cantankerous little monkey! I hate him. I don't see how he got his job on the steamboat."

"He's liable to lose it after to-night," chuckled Johnson.

Bagley made no reply to that, and for a little while the men smoked in silence.

"It's time we were startin' on, pard," said Johnson at last, knocking the ashes out of his pipe. "It's your turn to act as pack mule."

"How far d'ye expect to carry it? Remember, I ain't as strong as you," said Bagley, with a growl.

"Well, lug it as far as the road, and I'll relieve you for a spell."

"It means that you chaps are our prisonerds," replied Tom,

The boys heard the men get up inside, and they prepared for action.

"You tackle Bagley," whispered Tom. "He's got the box and will be at a disadvantage. Slug him good and hard. I'll hold up Johnson with my gun."

Johnson came out first, and then Bagley followed, with the box on his shoulder.

"Hold!" cried Tom, aiming his revolver at Johnson, who started back with a deep imprecation.

Biff!

Bob's hard fist landed on Bagley's nose, and box and rascal went to the ground together.

Then the sturdy young agent jumped on Bagley's chest and pinned him where he lay.

"What in thunder does this mean?" roared Johnson.

"It means that you chaps are our prisoners," replied Tom, resolutely.

"Your prisoners!" sneered Johnson. "I guess not."

He ran his right hand to his hip-pocket, and Tom, believing that he was about to draw a weapon, fired at his arm.

Johnson uttered a scream of pain, and a succession of groans, as his arm fell, useless, by his side.

With a terrible string of profanity, he made a dash at Tom, raising his left arm to strike him.

The boy stepped aside and the man fell over some creeping vines and lay there, groaning with anguish.

Tom turned his revolver on Bagley, who was putting up a strong fight with Bob, in an effort to upset him.

"Surrender, Mr. Bagley, or I may treat you to a dose of the same medicine I just handed out to your side partner."

Practically that was a bluff, as Tom had no intention of shooting Bagley.

However, his resolute demeanor and stern words had the requisite effect.

Mr. Bagley was a coward when he saw a gun in front of him, and he threw up his hands, yielding sullenly enough.

"Tie his hands behind his back with your handkerchief, Bob. The company will present you with a new one."

So Bob tied Bagley's wrists together and then told him to get up.

"See that he doesn't get away, Bob," said Tom, turning his attention to Johnson, who was evidently suffering so much that all the spirit was taken out of him. "Get up, Johnson. I'm sorry I had to shoot, but you were going to draw that re-

volver on me that I see sticking out of your pocket, and self-preservation is the first law of nature. Get on your feet and I'll take you to a doctor."

Tom reached down, took possession of Johnson's weapon and handed it to Bob.

Bagley's companion got up, with many groans.

Tom then shouldered the money-box and ordered the men to march.

They were taken directly to Mr. Pennington's house, and Johnson was permitted to lie on the lounge in the sitting-room.

Tom went to the telephone and rang up the solitary night operator in the Liberty telephone office.

He first asked to be connected with Dr. Kent.

When he got the physician on the wire he told him he wanted him to come out to the Pennington farm to set a man's arm, which had been broken by a revolver shot.

He then got put in connection with the village head officer.

He told him to come out in his wagon and take charge of two crooks whom he and Bob Pennington had captured red-handed.

Inside of twenty minutes the doctor drove up, and was soon attending the wounded man.

By the time he was through the officer appeared.

The prisoners were loaded on the wagon, and so was the box of money, which would have to be used in evidence against the rascals.

Tom went along, as he had to go back to Liberty anyway, for he had a room there.

Bagley and Johnson were put in the lock-up, while the money was carried to the bank and delivered to the night watchman for security's sake.

Then Tom went home, after promising to be on hand at the magistrate's office next morning to press the charge of robbery against the two prisoners.

He was a happy boy again, for he had recovered the \$15,000.

CHAPTER XV.

TOM AND ELSIE ATTEND ELSIE FRENCH'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.

At ten o'clock the prisoners were brought into the magistrate's office by Officer Wagner.

Tom was on hand to give his evidence, and Bob was there, too, to back him up.

It was a clear case against Tom Johnson and William Bagley, and the magistrate remanded them to the county jail in Carlyle for trial at the next term of the court.

Tom then rang Mr. French up on the long-distance telephone and told him the whole story.

Tom also surprised him by telling him that these were the two men who had robbed his home and caused the fire.

"Are you prepared to swear to that fact, Tom?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. I am positive they are the men. One, I am sorry to say, is my late aunt's husband. But he richly deserves all that's coming to him."

"I will have them both indicted for robbery and arson, pre-meditated or accidental. It will stand against them while they're in prison for the stealing of the money-box, and then they'll be arrested at once and tried on that charge, which is bound to send them back for another term of years."

Elsie had congratulations for Tom also when next he came to Cherryville, and then he confessed to her how bad he had felt that night over the loss of the box.

"Well, Tom, I think you have made an excellent defence, and had you lost the money I should not have held it against you."

"You are very kind to say that, Elsie. It is a great relief to my mind to feel that I would have had at least one true friend—my little partner."

"You will always find me your true and earnest friend, Tom," she replied, in a tone that left him no excuse to doubt the sincerity of her words.

On the whole, the month of July proved a good one, financially considered, for the new company, and August was equally prosperous on the balance sheet.

It now became generally known that Tom Sheridan was practically the Transportation Company himself, which disclosure caused many persons to cease to wonder how he came to be at the head of the concern.

The girls all set their caps at him, but it didn't do them any good.

His thoughts were anchored at the French home in Cherry-

ville, and, as far as he was concerned, there were two flukes to the anchor.

After the first of October, Tom cut out the morning trip and changed the time of the afternoon boat as follows:

"Leave Liberty at 2 p. m., arrive at Cherryville at 4 p. m.; leaving Cherryville at 5 p. m., arrive at Liberty at 2 p. m."

This was due to the closing of the fruit season, and was made after a conference with his three principal shippers, whom he invited to his office for that purpose.

About the middle of October, Elsie gave a birthday party at her home, and, of course, Tom was invited.

She would as soon have thought of jumping into the Maumee River as to give a party and not have him as the bright particular star of the occasion.

Bob was also invited to be present, and both the boys, arrayed in their best apparel, took the two o'clock boat for Cherryville on the day in question.

Tom only knew two or three of Elsie's own set, and Bob none at all.

However, she seemed to enjoy the task of introducing them, especially Tom, and both boys were favorably received in the aristocratic social atmosphere of Cherryville's highest circles.

They had a pretty swell time of it, and enjoyed every minute.

Tom danced with Elsie so many times that some of the girls and boys got jealous, but Tom made himself so popular on the whole that no one could find fault with him.

Bob managed to pick up one little brunette beauty to whom he paid particular attention, to the great amusement of Tom and Elsie.

The supper was the event of the evening, and both boys, in common with all the young guests, did ample justice to it.

As it was too late for them to think of returning to Liberty when the party broke up, they were invited to stay all night at the French mansion.

In fact, they remained in town until five the next afternoon, when the steamboat returned up the branch.

By this time Tom Johnson and William Bagley were getting accustomed to their quarters in the State prison, where they had been sent for fifteen years apiece—their prior conviction for the Farmer Whipple attempted burglary telling against them.

Bob, having told all his friends and acquaintances what a bang-up time he and Tom had at Miss French's birthday party in Cherryville, the news naturally reached the ears of Ezra Whipple.

The result was that he persuaded his mother to allow him to have a birthday party, too.

He sent out a pile of invitations to those he thought were his friends, but he took mighty good care not to include Tom and Bob in the list.

When the girls who were invited found that neither Tom nor Bob, who were by long odds the most popular lads in the neighborhood, were not going to be at the party, the majority of them decided to stay at home, and they did.

Most of the boys, when they learned, in one way or another, that their particular girl was not going to attend, also stayed away.

The result was that the party was something of a frost, and Ezra felt cheaper than sour apples.

Of course, Tom and Bob heard that the Whipple party had been a failure, and they grinned quietly at each other, for they knew what Ezra had aimed at when he got up his party, and they were rather tickled because his scheme had missed fire.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

With the reduction of freight carried, Tom had to reduce his help some.

Three deckhands were sufficient to do all the work on the steamer.

Bob's assistant was also laid off.

On the first of December a trip up and down the branch every other day was enough to handle all the business that came Tom's way.

He was satisfied if the boat paid expenses, and sometimes it didn't do that.

Most every business has its dull spell, and the young steamboat magnate was now experiencing his.

While he had loads of time on his hands he amused himself planning for the next season.

There was a large town called Colfax, three miles west of Liberty.

It was located on the A. & T. Railroad, the station and freight sidings being on the side facing Liberty.

This was the place where Messrs. Brown, Jones and Robinson, the fruit, produce and dairy product shippers had been obliged to send their stuff for shipment by rail before Tom started his steamboat line.

Colfax was also close to the head of the Maumee Branch, but owing to the flats a mile below the town, that is, toward Liberty, no craft of any draft could pass up to its water front.

Tom, however, got an idea in his head that a channel could be dredged through the flats.

The question was, how much would the work cost, and also could the channel, if made, be kept open at small expense?

One day he went to Toledo to consult with the manager of a Lake Erie dredging and wrecking company.

This man declared he could furnish no opinion on the subject without one of his experts went over the ground and made a thorough examination.

This would cost a certain amount of money and might yield unpromising results, after all.

Tom returned to Cherryville and laid the matter before Mr. French.

"It would mean a whole lot to me if I could get my boat through to Colfax. Would you advise me to undertake the expense of a survey?"

"Tom," replied Mr. French, "I would rather you'd use your own judgment in this matter. It is ever so much better for a boy or man to rely on himself, as a rule, for it brings out any latent energies he may possess, and vastly strengthens his grip on the strenuous conditions of life."

Tom went home and thought the matter over, with the result that he ordered the Toledo company to make the survey and submit an estimate if the project was practicable.

The survey was duly made, and the manager of the dredging company notified Tom that his diver had discovered a filled-up channel through the flats.

He said that in the spring he would undertake to dredge it out for so much, and that in his opinion it could be kept clear by looking after it once a year.

Tom was delighted at the prospect and called on Elsie to consult with her about the matter.

She told him to go ahead, if he thought it best to do so.

Accordingly, at the proper time the dredging company sent its float up to the branch, and commenced operations.

The channel was opened up, and after running the Elsie French through to Colfax one day, to the great surprise of the people along the water front, Tom publicly announced that the steamboat would make regular trips between Colfax and Cherryville, via Liberty, until further notice.

He changed the name of his line to the Colfax & Cherryville Transportation Co. and removed his office to Colfax.

He inserted a standing advertisement in the town newspapers, and called personally on the more important shippers, to whom he submitted through water rates to Toledo and intermediate points.

He received encouragement enough to guarantee the complete success of his venture, and the receipts during the year were more than double what they had previously been on the original route.

The running schedule was only increased by fifteen minutes, but the carrying capacity of the Elsie French was frequently severely tested, and sometimes freight had to be refused for certain trips.

At the close of the year Tom mustered up the courage to ask Elsie if she would enter into new articles of partnership, the term of which should be for life.

Her answer was "Yes," and in the following June she changed her name to Elsie Sheridan, in the presence of a large crowd at the church she attended in Cherryville.

Tom now has two steamers on the Branch, both paying well, and has proved beyond all doubt that he is a boy who, in starting his own business, caught on.

Next week's issue will contain "A CORNER IN STOCK; OR, THE WALL STREET BOY WHO WON."

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE

CURRENT NEWS

Among the numerous superstitions of the Cossacks there is none stronger than the belief that they are more likely to be welcomed in heaven if they are personally clean at the time they are killed. Consequently, before an expected battle they perform their toilets with scrupulous care, dress themselves in clean garments and put on the best they have.

What is said to be the most promising of the inventions submitted during the year to the Interstate Commerce Commission in its contest for a successful railway safety device for the regulation of traffic is an apparatus on which a patent has just been secured by a Spokane, Washington, inventor. The device is so arranged that steam is shut off from the cylinders and air is applied to the brakes when trains come within a predetermined distance of one another. Applications for patents on the device have been filed in England and France.

Stone money called "fei" is used in the island of Uep, among the Caroline Islands in the Pacific Ocean. The "fei" consists of large, solid, thick stone wheels, ranging in diameter from one to twelve feet, having a central hole through which a pole can be inserted so as to convert the inert mass into "currency." It is customary to "ear-mark" the money, as it were, and leave it in its position outside the first owner's hut. The owner for the time being possesses, meanwhile, power to wield the influence which attaches to this visible display of wealth.

W. C. King, of St. Paul, Minn., exhibit clerk for the State Board of Immigration, swallowed the beard of a stalk macaroni wheat. The beard stuck in his throat. He tried to cough it out. Recently the beard, one and one-fourth inches long, was removed from his right chest. At the time of the accident Mr. King noticed no ill-effects. While at the Galesburg, (Ill.) Fair his chest became sore. Mr. King did not know what was the matter. Neither did a physician he called. But the pain grew less, and he forgot about it.

The striking spectacle presented by Venus and Jupiter in close proximity to each other in the evening sky on February 13th and 14th led to needless perturbation in many parts of France, where the two planets were mistaken by the unastronomical majority for the lights of a Zeppelin. At Rouen the alarm was complete; the approach of the hostile craft was announced by the firing of a cannon, the fire department turned out, and the people were not reassured until the planets had sunk peacefully below the horizon.

A new analysis of the water of the Dead Sea, supposed to cover the site of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, has recently been made by Mr. C. Ainsworth Mitchell. He finds that the amount of saline matter in solution in

the water, instead of being more than forty-six per cent., as estimated by Lavoisier, is only between twenty-four and twenty-five per cent. The percentage of common salt is 8.52 as against 2.8 in ordinary sea water. While in ocean water there is seven times as much common salt as magnesium chloride, in the water of the Dead Sea they are about equal in quantity. A gallon of distilled water weighs ten pounds, a gallon of ocean water weighs ten and a quarter pounds, and a gallon of Dead Sea water twelve pounds.

Richard S. Wooldridge, cashier of the Bank of Harrisonville, Missouri, bids fair to win fame as the man who invented a safety release for locks on bank safes. Some time ago Mr. Wooldridge rigged up a simple device for opening the safe from the inside, so that in event he was inadvertently locked in he might make his escape. The device is a sort of screwlike arrangement that engages certain parts of the lock and frees it from all other parts of the lock. He has tested it with time locks and all other safety devices turned on and has made his exit without a particle of trouble. He expects to apply for a patent on the device, so it will be applicable for practically all bank safes.

Lawbreakers may be nipped in the bud most effectively by the police nippers invented by John J. Murphy, of Norwich, Connecticut. The police nippers or "leaders," as they are sometimes called, are clasped about the wrist or even the ankles of the arrested man. The advantage of the new nippers is not alone in their effectiveness but also in the fact that they may be quickly and easily operated with one hand. The closing of the hand about the handle portions of the nippers causes the jaws to close. These are pivotally connected by opposed extending arms, with a sliding tubular member attached to the T-shaped inner handle. This tubular member slides on a basic rod, to which the outer T-shaped handle is mounted. It takes but an instant to clasp the nippers on the wrist of an offender.

Not only is the United States building battleships of great displacement, as witness our Pennsylvania of 31,400 tons, but the other nations, with the exception of Great Britain, are keeping well abreast of us in this respect. Thus, the Russian navy is completing this year four battle cruisers of 32,200 tons. Japan has in commission her 30,600-ton battleship Fuso, and she is building three others, due to go into commission this year and next, of 31,300 tons. Italy will complete next year four battleships of 30,000 tons displacement, and Germany, it is believed, has completed since the war began three ships of close to 30,000 tons. The Japanese ships are to have a speed of 22.5 knots; the German, 23 knots; the Italian battleships, 25 knots, and the Russian battle-cruisers, 25½ knots.

HARRY, THE HUSTLER

— OR —

THE BOY WHO WAS READY FOR BUSINESS

By GASTON GARNE

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER XVIII (continued)

The boys slept the sleep of the just that night, being thoroughly fatigued.

They were up early, and saw nothing of any of the Bunce bunch at the breakfast-table.

Immediately after breakfast Harry started in to perfectly memorize Joe's lecture, while Joe himself went out in the town.

At ten o'clock another note from the enemy was handed in.

This time it was altogether of a different sort.

The note read as follows:

"Mr. Henry Howe:

"Dear Sir—Pardon the liberty I am taking, but I feel that I cannot rest until I have more properly thanked you for the very great service you rendered me on the occasion of the railroad wreck. In the excitement of that awful moment I was able but faintly to express the gratitude I really feel. If it is not presuming too much, I ask you to wait on me at Parlor A, that I may have a few moments' conversation with you. Sincerely your friend,

"JULIA BUNCE."

Over this letter Harry pondered long.

Was it sincere, or was it a trap? He could not determine, and on the other hand he could not refuse so polite a request on the part of a lady.

At last he determined to risk it, and sent word that he would call at Parlor A in about a quarter of an hour.

The dress-suitcase was taxed to its utmost to make our hero presentable, and in due time he knocked at the door of Parlor A.

Miss Bunce opened the door in person. She was quite alone.

"Oh, Mr. Howe," she exclaimed gushingly, "I am so glad to see you. I was so afraid that you would think me presuming, and—and—well, you know I just couldn't let it go as it was."

Harry was not smitten.

Miss Julia's manner was wholly insincere.

He accepted the seat she offered him, and replied rather stiffly:

"Why, Miss Bunce, what I did really amounted to nothing at all."

"Oh, how can you say that when you know you saved me from being burned to death?" gushed Miss Bunce. "I

suppose I am not worth very much to anybody but my poor father, but you know life is sweet."

Making a complimentary remark, Harry turned the conversation into general channels. He inquired if this was her first visit to the Black Hills country, and, receiving a reply in the affirmative, asked how she liked it, and so on.

At last, finding that there was not likely to be anything in the interview but the smallest of small talk, he arose to take his leave, feeling that there was nothing in the call but the desire of a romantic girl to cultivate his acquaintance.

He was mistaken, however, and he knew it before he reached the door, for who should walk out from an adjoining room but old Bunce himself.

"Oh, Mr. Howe! Stop a minute!" shrilled Miss Julia. "I want to introduce you to my father."

"Why, Howe, my boy! How-de-do?" cried the contractor, pushing forward and seizing Harry's hand with a great show of hearty friendliness. "We need no introduction. We were introduced all right there at the wreck. Say, you have put me under everlasting obligations to you. Sit down for a few minutes and give a fellow a chance to get acquainted. We want to know you, Howe! Have a cigar? Light up. Julie don't mind."

As Mr. Bunce produced cigars he touched the electric bell.

Harry declined the cigar, and resumed his seat.

"What! You don't smoke?" cried Bunce. "Well, well! Never mind! I've rung for the waiter. Shall I order a cold bottle, or will you take whisky? Anything you say goes."

"Well, I'm not saying, for I don't drink."

"Pshaw, man! What nonsense! Everybody drinks in these days. If I can't do it any other way we'll make it beer."

"We'll make it nothing stronger than seltzer as far as I am concerned," said Harry, and even when Julia protested and declared that he really must have a glass of wine with her, he remained firm. So the hall boy was dismissed without an order, but old Bunce kept rattling on.

"How was his old friend, Mr. Longworth? How was business? He had heard that Mr. Longworth was about to retire. No? That was not true; then he wished it was true in his own case. There was not a dollar in contracting any more; everything was so cut up nowadays."

While old Bunce was rattling on in this strain, Julia arose and excused herself.

"We really must see more of you, Mr. Howe," she said. "Father and I are going for a drive this afternoon, as I wish to see something of this wonderful country. If you won't accept our hospitality in any other way you won't refuse me the pleasure of your company, I am sure."

"I really must decline, Miss Bunce," replied Harry. "I have too much business on hand, and cannot spare the time."

"Oh, we will see about that!" said Julia, laughingly. "I am coming back in a few minutes, and we will talk it over then."

She swept out of the room, throwing a languishing glance at our hero.

No doubt she meant to be extremely captivating, but she had gone the wrong way to work to capture Harry Howe.

Old Bunce, however, had not given up the job, by any means. He came right down to business, and showed his hands the moment Julia was out of the room.

"Say, Howe," he began, "you have taken rather an aggressive stand in this bridge contract business. Don't you think so, now?"

"I don't know that I have," replied Harry. "I've been doing a little hustling—that's all."

"There's no doubt that you are a hustler," said Mr. Bunce, with a grim smile. "That is proved. You have also proved yourself ready for business. That being the case, there is nothing left for me to do but to prove myself ready for business, too. I'm a man who don't mince matters. I hit the nail square on the head. Call off your dogs. Abandon this lecture. Here, between ourselves, where there are no witnesses, I'll admit to you that I furnished the specifications for this new bridge. You shall see them if you want to, and I'll show you just how much money there is in the contract. I shall be ready to put a proposition to you, then."

"Put it now," said Harry, quietly. "There can be no better time."

"All right," replied old Bunce. "I agree with you. Let's make a deal and divide?"

CHAPTER XIX.

HARRY HUSTLES JOE OUT OF THE WINDOW.

Harry was by far too shrewd to turn down old Bunce offhand, and indignantly reject his proposition.

He felt perfectly well satisfied that they were not alone, without a witness.

He was as certain as though he could see the spy that either Tom Trafton or Jack Winston was listening behind the inner door through which Mr. Bunce had entered the room.

"I'm ready for business, Mr. Bunce," he replied, "but you must not forget that I represent Mr. Longworth."

"I know," said the contractor. "Longworth is a good fellow. None better. I have known him for years: the

only trouble with him is he is dead slow when it comes to closing a contract on modern lines, that's all."

"It may be so. I have only been with him in this business. I suppose I have a lot to learn."

"We are none of us too old to learn, young man; I know I am not. But looker here, what's the use in finishing your education with an old back number like Bill Longworth? Why not make a break while there is a chance?"

"I don't exactly see the chance. I don't know what you mean."

"If I really thought you didn't I should put you down for greener than I believe you to be. But I guess you understand my meaning well enough. Any time you get tired of New York, which is as much of a back number among cities of this United States as Bill Longworth is among contractors, just take a run out to Chicago and call on Bunce & Co."

This was the merest bluff, of course.

"Oh, I'm very much satisfied with my present job, Mr. Bunce," he replied.

"You think you are, but you don't know what is best for your future as well as an old man like myself does. Howe, you have put me under a big obligation to you. There is a place open for you in my office any time."

"Thank you, sir," replied Harry. "Well, there is a whole lot in what you say, I will admit. Suppose you just give me a little memorandum of this, and I'll take it into consideration?"

"Put it in writing?" gasped Bunce. "Good heavens, Howe! Can't you trust my word in a matter like this?"

"Oh, just as you please," laughed Harry. "You do business in Chicago style, and I do it the old New York way. We have a little more method in our way, perhaps."

"We'll take that matter up later," said Bunce quickly. "Now about the bridge contract. We may as well come to an understanding on that."

"If we can," said Harry.

"If we can, as you say."

"Well?"

"I have asked you to call off your dogs. Are you willing to do it—under conditions?"

"Certainly I am—under conditions."

"Put your proposition, and I'll take it into consideration."

"Oh, no! You are the one to put the proposition."

"Do you want me to put a proposition for Longworth, or a proposition for Howe?" asked the contractor, closing one eye.

"You might put it both ways."

"Well, then, I—"

"Oh, hold on, Mr. Bunce," said Harry, rising. "I must still stick to the old New York way of doing business, slow as it is. The proposition must be in writing. You can send it up to my room, and I will give it immediate consideration."

"Hold on! Hold on!" cried Bunce. "Don't go. You can't expect me to put such business on paper, man!"

"Then don't put it."

(To be continued)

ITEMS OF INTEREST

TREE 720 YEARS OLD FELLED.

An elm tree that was a sapling when Columbus discovered America, and which for more than seven hundred and twenty years has stood near to the site of historic Fort Ticonderoga, has just been cut down. The trunk of the tree measures sixty-eight feet to the limbs and is sixty inches in circumference at the base. The top measures twenty-seven inches.

THROWS CURVES WITH SPEED.

Dan Handelan, inventor of the baseball courts, has just completed a machine which will take the place of a pitcher. The outfit, which will be portable, will be set up in the pitcher's box. It will be electrically operated from the bench by the manager. It will pitch any kind of a curve, a fast or slow ball, and will throw to any of the bases instantly. The machine is said to be about ready for public inspection.

SAYS BERLIN BETRAYED THE IRISH.

Herbert Samuel, the Home Secretary, in an address at the National Liberal Club on the Irish revolt, said the uprising was a foolish one because its leaders rashly had put faith in German aid. He continued: "I believe that when the full story of the rebellion comes to be written it will be found nothing has been so significant in this crisis as the manner in which the German Government betrayed those whom they had duped. Undoubtedly the leaders of the revolt anticipated substantial aid from those they called their Continental allies."

BIG GAIN IN CIGARETTES.

Sales of cigarettes manufactured in the United States in the first quarter of 1916 established a high record for all equal periods in the history of the industry. The gain over the same period of last year was 1,484,000,000, or 41.8 per cent., according to the records of Dow, Jones & Co. Last year, in the full twelve months, production amounted to 18,000,000,000 cigarettes and if the current rate of consumption is maintained, 1916 will see more than 21,000,000,000 marketed from factories of this country. The output in 1914 was about 16,000,000,000.

OUR LACK OF SCOUTS.

"The mightiest battleship, unattended by numerous swift satellites is a blind behemoth, and a squadron of battleships without its proper complement of auxiliary craft, is constantly exposed to sudden disaster. This was a self-evident truth long before the present war, yet it would seem to have been ignored by the American naval administration until very recently." Thus says the Naval and Military Record, and the statement is correct, for out of our thirty-two cruisers three only are able to steam at 23 to 23½ knots. We must lift our speed everywhere, for foreign navies have 25-knot battleships, 35- to 37-knot destroyers, 30-knot scouts and 18- to 20-knot submarines.

DISINFECTS LEAD PENCILS.

Lead pencils are germ carriers which may transmit disease, especially to children, most of whom have the habit of putting pencils in their mouths. A New Jersey inventor has devised a disinfecting rack to guard against this danger, Popular Mechanics tells us. This rack consists of a square metal frame, or case, about 3 inches deep. In its top are small holes through which pencils may be inserted. Beneath the top is a tablet of clay composition in which are depressions corresponding to the holes above. Into these the pencil ends project, without touching the clay, and are disinfected by formalin gas exuding from the clay, which has been previously charged with that disinfectant. The pencil of each child may be assigned a certain place in the rack.

A PEACE-MAKER.

Venezuela defaulted in her debts to Germany and several other European powers. To collect them, Germany persuaded some of these powers to join her in a blockade of Venezuela, and proposed to land troops. Roosevelt pointed out that such a landing would violate the Monroe Doctrine, and proposed arbitration. Germany refused. Then Roosevelt sent a quiet, verbal, unpublished message to the Emperor that, unless he consented to arbitrate, Dewey's fleet would sail in forty-eight hours to defend Venezuela. The Emperor's consent came in thirty-six hours, with an invitation that Roosevelt act as arbitrator. Roosevelt publicly praised the Emperor's magnanimity, but turned the case over to The Hague Tribunal of Arbitration. The public knew nothing of the secret ultimatum till years later when "The Life of John Hay" was published. Thus, Roosevelt defended the Monroe Doctrine, kept peace, saved the Kaiser's pride, and made America respected.

California was ablaze against the Japanese, excluding them from her schools, and protesting against coolie immigration. But our treaty guaranteed both these privileges to the Japanese. Roosevelt here showed his deepest skill. For California, he secured a "gentlemen's agreement" with Japan to keep the coolies at home. For Japan, he brought legal suits to restore the school privileges to Japanese children. Japan realized Roosevelt was her friend and took pride in doing the graceful thing. California was satisfied.

War had been openly discussed in Japan, but the menace melted before our public was aware of it, because of Roosevelt's prompt and fair action. Then, lest any foreigners should fancy that our friendly diplomacy was inspired by weakness, Roosevelt ordered our whole battle fleet to sail around the world, making a cordial call on Japan. Such a round-the-world cruise by a full and equipped fleet had never been done before. Roosevelt did this in face of great opposition at home. But the world saw its meaning of preparedness. Japan saw, and respected.

HAL, THE POOR BOY

— OR —

THE ADVENTURES OF TWO ORPHANS

By ED KING

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER II (Continued)

A derisive shout greeted them when they were dragged into the barn.

"Hello, where did you catch the kids, Aleck?" cried a burly tramp, who was just lighting his pipe.

"Outside there. They jumped out of the window. Guess they are too high-toned for us, and meant to give us the cold shake," was the reply.

"The deuce you say. Millionaires' sons, mebbe. Well, they look it. Say, you tall one, got any dough?"

"I haven't anything," replied Hal. "Let us go, mister; we're only a couple of poor boys."

"Search 'em, Aleck," ordered the fat hobo.

Of course, no money was found on the boys.

Meanwhile, the fat tramp had produced a harmonica, and began to play.

"Can you dance, Lengthy?" he asked Hal.

"No," replied Hal.

"And the little one?"

"No; he can't dance, either."

"Well, you will, then. Aleck shall learn you, Lace 'em, Aleck! Lace 'em, an' make 'em leg it, just for fun!"

One of them had an old horsewhip, which had been stolen somewhere.

It was handed to Aleck, and he began cracking the lash around the legs of the boys, while the fat man played a jig.

The sting of the lash made the boys jump about, of course, and the tramps were roaring with laughter, when all at once an old man with a white beard and his feet tied up in bags, shuffled into the barn.

"What's all this? What's all this?" he demanded.

"Why, it's old Dawley!" exclaimed Aleck. "Say, we are only having a dance!"

"Let those boys alone," ordered the old man, sternly.

Aleck cracked his whip around Hal's legs again, as he spoke.

He had done it just once too often.

Hal's blood was all up now.

He sprang at Aleck, and dealt him a stinging blow between the eyes.

Down went the hobo, flat on his back, while Hal and Terry made for the door.

Several started to catch them, but old Dawley planted himself in the way.

"Let the kids go!" he cried. "Serves Aleck right!"

"Hey, you fellers!" he bawled after the boys, who were

running for their lives. "Look out for Water Valley if you are working South! If you value your lives, don't strike below it. Now, mind!"

Hal and Terry heard him, of course.

But they did not understand the warning, and just then were in no frame of mind to stop and think.

As will soon be seen, they had every reason to wish they had done so later on.

The boys ran on through the rain, and were soon well away from the barn.

"Oh, Hal, I don't believe I can stand this much longer," said Terry. "I am wet to the skin, and so lame and sore."

"Brace up, Terry," said Hal, putting his arm affectionately around the neck of his chum. "There are better times coming, boy."

"If I only thought so, Hal, but I am so hungry! You don't know how hungry I am."

"By gracious, I think I do, Terry. You have just as much in your stomach as I have, every bit!"

"Oh, I know that, Hal. I'm not saying a word; but it don't seem as though I could stand it much longer unless I can get something to eat."

"Hello!" cried Hal. "What have we struck? You shall have a square meal, Terry, if I have to go to every house in this place and beg it for you. Brace up for just a little while."

A sudden turn in the road had shown Hal something which gave him hope.

Right ahead was a cluster of houses, which had been entirely concealed by the strip of woodland through which they were passing.

There was the store, and the tavern, and the cotton gin, and the bank, and the railroad station.

A broad, swollen stream ran under a bridge, and went tumbling into the Mississippi over a stretch of sloping ground.

Seen even in the rain, it was a pretty place, and there seemed to be quite a number of people in the main street, moving about under umbrellas.

The boys tramped on over the bridge.

It trembled beneath them. The water was almost up to the planks.

"It wouldn't take much to send this bridge into the Mississippi," remarked Hal. "For my part, I'd rather be on foot than in that rig."

The rig in question was a buggy coming rapidly down the road toward the bridge.

The boys walked on, keeping close to the stream, the stores being on the other side of the street.

Hal felt that he would like to size up the place a bit before crossing.

They had just reached the cotton gin, which stood on the bank of the rushing stream, when the buggy struck the bridge and started to cross.

There was a gentleman in a mackintosh driving, and a very pretty young girl by his side.

The gentleman turned right onto the bridge, and was at about the middle of it, when a loud cracking of timbers was heard, and, to the horror of all who witnessed the disaster, the bridge slipped from its fastenings and went whirling down the stream, carrying the team with it, while the girl screamed loudly for help.

"Oh, look! Look!" cried Terry.

"They are goners unless something is done to help them!" Hal exclaimed.

"Hey! It's Colonel Crofut and his daughter!" yelled a man from the other side of the way, and people came running across to the stream.

But shouts and talk would not save the colonel and his daughter.

To a dead certainty, they would have been swept into the Mississippi if it had not been for the prompt action of Hal North.

There was a coil of rope lying near the cotton gin. Hal seized it and ran down close to the bank.

On came the bridge, swirling down the stream.

Colonel Crofut had climbed out of the buggy and ran to the forward end of this impromptu raft.

"Throw me a line, somebody! Throw me a line, for heaven's sake!" he cried.

He did not see Hal, but there the poor boy was, all ready for him.

"Look out, sir! Here she comes!" shouted Hal, and, swinging the rope about his head, he sent it whirling toward the bridge.

CHAPTER III.

CAPTURED BY MAN-HUNTERS.

Colonel Crofut caught the rope, and made it fast around the bridge rail.

The progress of the bridge down the stream was now stayed, and the crowd, pushing the boys aside, laid hold of the line, and drew it in alone.

Nobody paid the least attention to Hal and Terry.

They drew back by the cotton gin to avoid the crowd.

Amid great confusion, Colonel Crofut managed to make a landing, and drove his team up the bank.

He exchanged a few hurried words with the bystanders, and then, jumping into the buggy, started to drive back by the way he had come.

"Oh, father! Aren't you going to say a word to the brave boy who saved our lives?" the girl exclaimed.

"The boy! Oh, yes! Where is he? Hello, a pair of them! Here, you boys, come here. Which one of you was it who threw me the rope?"

"I'm the one, sir," replied Hal.

"Oh, you are, hey? What's your name?"

"Hal North, sir."

"Well, then, Hal North, let me advise you to keep away from Water Valley," said the colonel, gruffly. "Here is something that will pay you for your trouble. Now you had better get a move on you as quickly as you can."

The girl blushed rosy red with shame when her father tossed Hal a quarter, and, applying the whip to the horse, drove away.

The crowd, black and white, burst forth in a loud laugh.

"Say, that's Crofut all over!" drawled a man with a big sombrero. "He's meaner than a dead cat on the garret stairs."

"That's so, too," said another. "But what he says is dead right, all the same; you boys better get out of town right lively. Thar's a law agin tramps hyar."

Hal was too frightened to say a word.

Visions of being locked up in jail rose before him.

"Come, Terry," he whispered, "we must be on the move."

Nobody said a word to stop them; not a soul gave them a kind look or offered a helping hand.

And yet Hal had performed a brave act.

It seemed as if the people of this town must be a particularly unfeeling lot.

At all events, they were down on hobos, and Hal felt that it was no place for them.

He merely stopped to enter a baker's and buy two loaves of bread, and then he and Terry plunged into the everlasting forest again, which began a few hundred yards behind the town.

This was Hal's second warning.

Beware of Water Valley! seemed to be the word.

And it was so, most emphatically.

If Hal and Terry had been posted, they would have known all about it.

In those days, Water Valley, Miss., and the country on to Greenville, was the terror of all tramps.

So greatly was it shunned by the hobos that many would go as much as sixty miles out of their way to avoid it.

The reason for this will be disclosed as our story advances.

At the present nothing more need be said about it, except that, unknown to Hal and Terry, the town they had just left was Water Valley.

Well would it have been for the unfortunate boys if they could have swam the swollen creek and retraced their steps toward Memphis, for trouble of which they little dreamed lay beyond.

The rain had let up a little now, and by and by, just about dark, it stopped altogether.

(To be continued)

TIMELY TOPICS

A beetle that eats its way through lead has been discovered at several places in the West, boring tiny holes through the lead sheath of copper-covered telephone cables. Why it does it is unexplained.

Noah Lundy, a farmer living near Arcola, Illinois, is mourning the loss of \$2,650 in crisp United States currency. Lundy had secreted the bills in a mail-order company's catalogue, and, while away from home, his wife, while cleaning house, burned the book along with other waste papers.

Twenty-six negroes, all women and children, except one, perished in a fire which destroyed a motion picture theater after a gasoline explosion at Wallacetown, near Norfolk, Va. A number of children were trampled to death in the rush to escape. Twenty persons were injured, some seriously.

Coran, Shask County, the smallest incorporated city in California, and once a popular mining camp, with a population of twenty-four, of whom nine are men, has eight offices to fill at the coming municipal election in April. One of the men, C. W. Barker, at present a city trustee, is also justice of the peace. He will not seek re-election. Every man in the city will be an office-holder unless some of the women could be induced to accept municipal honors.

Twenty years ago an American missionary resident in Shantung, China, brought to his mission station when returning from his furlough in the United States a quart of California peanuts, which he gave to a native convert as seed to replace the poor, shriveled, native peanut which possessed little or no marketing qualifications. To-day this quart of peanuts has spread all over Shantung province, resulting in giving to these people an export trade in this article of 150,000 tons a year.

The most singular forest growth in the world is encountered in the Falkland Islands, a dismal region constantly swept by a strong polar wind. What appears to be weather-worn and moss-covered boulders are scattered about, and when one of these curious objects is seized in an attempt to overturn it strong roots are found to hold it down, these "boulders" being, in fact, native trees which the wind has forced to assume this shape. The wood appears to be a twisted mass of fibers almost impossible to cut up into fuel.

William M. Lowrey, a blind Cherokee Indian, is at his desk every day in the mailing division of the Union Indian Agency, in Muskogee, Oklahoma, while on the payroll as an Indian policeman, he is used as an interpreter, and is a good one. When not thus employed, he works in the mailing division. For a number of years Lowrey

conducted a cross-roads store east of Muskogee, and made a good living. He has a son eleven years old and wanted to get him in the Muskogee schools. He applied for a position as interpreter at the Indian agency, and thus connected with the payroll of Uncle Sam. He has his son read the newspapers to him.

Since the outbreak of the war the British navy has shown a marvelous increase in ships and men. About 1,100,000 tons have been added in ships and the regular enlisted force has been doubled. Not only has the mighty German fleet been shut up in the Baltic, but in practically every quarter of the globe the British fleet has been transporting troops and munitions of war and keeping open the trade routes of the world. The task in the Mediterranean alone has been a most serious one, as witness the statement of the First Lord of the Admiralty that 1,000,000 combatants, 1,000,000 horses, 2,500,000 tons of stores and 27,000,000 gallons of oil have been transported to the Mediterranean for the use of the British and their allies.

One of the most interesting and remarkable of the many regions for the observation of sand dunes lies between Bordeaux and Bayonne, in Gascony. The sea here throws every year upon the beach, along a line of one hundred miles in length, some five million cubic yards of sand. The prevailing westerly winds continue picking up the surface particles from the westward slope, whirl them over to the inward slope, where they are again deposited, and the entire ridge, by this means alone, moves gradually inward. In the course of years there has thus been formed a complex system of dunes, all approximately parallel with the coast, and with one another of all altitudes up to two hundred and fifty feet. These are marching steadily inward at a rate of from three to six feet a year, whole villages having sometimes been torn down to prevent burial and rebuilt at a distance.

Simon Lake, inventor and builder of submarines, lecturing recently before the New York Electrical Society on "The Submarine in the Present War," said this country should adopt the policy of European governments and guarantee to manufacturers of undersea boats that they will not sustain any loss on contracts of an experimental character. "The quickest and most reliable defense for the United States," said Mr. Lake, "would be a large fleet of what I term 'amphibious' submarines. I mean boats not too heavy to be transported by rail. Then let our railroads run their tracks down to the water and we would be prepared to shift immediately the boats from one point to another along the coast." Mr. Lake said the weak point in the submarine as now constructed was the necessity of directing the aim of the torpedoes with the boat itself. The submarine, he added, "has saved countless thousands of lives by preventing the warships from raiding enemy coasts."

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BRIEF BUT POINTED ITEMS

Five thousand employees of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company's steel mill at Pueblo have been granted an increase in wages, adding \$40,000 to the company's monthly payroll, according to announcement by officials of the company.

Dr. John Grier Hibben, president of Princeton University, will be present at the Plattsburg encampment for a week this summer, according to a statement from him the other day. One hundred Princeton students have signed for the encampment.

Ten tons of skins of the begula, or white whale, received from Bering Sea were shipped from Seattle to Eastern shoe factories to be made into the white shoes now so popular among women. The begula abounds in Bering Sea and Cook Inlet, and the new fashion has stimulated the hunting of the animal.

The will of William S. Murphy, by which his entire estate of \$40,000 was left to Harvard University to provide scholarships for young men named Murphy, has been admitted to probate. Cousins in Worcester and New Haven, Conn., who had contested the will, withdrew their objections after an agreement by which they received a small amount.

An opossum with five legs was captured at Smith's Landing, New Jersey, by Thomas E. Allen. The animal was caught in a trap. The fifth leg juts out from between the shoulders in front, but did not seem to interfere with the animal's movements in the least. Many people are curiously viewing the freak, having never before seen an opossum so built.

A new method of fooling the fish has been discovered by the owner of a fishing boat in Berwickshire, Scotland. He uses a net dyed the hue of the sea, and the result has always been a much better catch. A convincing test was recently made, when a fleet of sixty-five fishing craft competed. One of the boats used nets dyed blue, and the others the usual brown nets. The blue nets in every test bagged the most fish.

That our American soldiers in Mexico are in need of some of the luxuries, if not the necessities, such as we have been sending to the men in the trenches of Europe's battlefields is the suggestion coming from Washington through the newspaper correspondents. Good, substantial socks are desirable gifts, and automobile goggles as protection against Mexican sand storms would be welcomed by the enlisted men. In view of the experience of an officer of the Allies whose tour of duty while wearing a pair of gift socks was made particularly uncomfortable owing to the unsuspected presence of a visiting card crumpled up in one of the socks, it is suggested that donors of such gifts put them outside the socks rather than within them. Chewing gum, tobacco and cigarettes may be added to the list, but candy is not among the things wanted at present, owing to the deluge of gifts of sweets that resulted from an appeal of some weeks ago.

JOKES AND JESTS

"Waiter, is this beef stew or Hungarian goulash?" "Let me see. This is Wednesday, isn't it, sir? Then it's goulash."

Mamma—Ikey, vat you vant for yer birt'day? Ikey (after a pause)—A box of matches. Papa (proudly)—Such a peesness man he'll make.

"My husband considered a very long time before he proposed to me. He was very careful." "Ah, it's always those careful people who get taken in!"

Sister (who has just sung for charity)—Well, I never thought my voice would fill that big hall. Freshman Brother—Neither did I. I thought it would empty it.

Banks—I don't mind the influenza itself so much—it's the after-effects I'm afraid of. Rivers—The after-effects is what ails me. I'm dodging the doctor.

Mrs. Suburbs (to tramp)—Out of work, are you? Then you're just in time. I've a cord of wood to be cut up, and I was just going to send for a man to do it. Tramp—That so, mum? Where does he live? I'll go and get him.

Mistress—I don't want you to have so much company. You have more callers in a day than I have in a week. Domestic—Well, mum, perhaps if you'd try to be a little more agreeable you'd have as many friends as I have.

"But, father," protested the sweet young thing, "you have to dress this way these days to catch a husband." "You stand a better chance of catching cold," replied father.

"Did you notice that woman who just passed?" inquired he. "The one," responded she, "with the gray hat, the white feather, the red velvet roses, the mauve jacket, the black skirt, the mink furs and the lavender spats?" "Yes." "Not particularly."

THE BLACKSMITH.

By Horace Appleton

Young Joe, the blacksmith, was a sturdy fellow—rather tall, broad-shouldered, arms big with muscle, and a good-natured face, well worth seeing, if only for the bath of good-humor it gave you.

Everybody liked him, and his forge was a resort for village idlers, who loved to watch him strike the shining sparks from the glowing iron, and listen to his cheery voice—for something of a singer was Joe.

There was an hour in the day, from three to four in the afternoon, when Joe would have none of them. Why? Because the child Nellie, across the way—a blue-eyed, sunny thing, dearly loved by the blacksmith—always spent that hour with him.

As Joe worked, she was wont to stand, with hands behind her back, watching him in an old-fashioned way, quiet and talkative by turns. Sometimes she asked strange questions which would puzzle him.

When she was leaving, it was her habit to put her arms around his neck and kiss him; and they loved each other very, very much.

But time goes by for young and old. It seemed but a little while till Nellie became almost a woman, and it was no longer proper for her to go to Joe's forge; but to be sure he could go to her.

And now, not to linger by the way, Joe had learned to love her with the love of manhood, and she returned his love. They would have been very happy but for Nellie's father; the old man would have her look higher than a blacksmith. So when Richard Ross—young, handsome and rich—came to the cottage, the old man smiled and encouraged him.

This Richard Ross was not worthy of Nellie. For all his riches, his heart was merest dross beside the pure gold of Joe's. When he passed the shop the sturdy smith brought his hammer down like an angry giant; for, you see, this Richard Ross was stealing his life away.

One evening Nellie's father shut the door in his face, with a "I don't want you coming here any more."

Joe knew how obedient the girl was, and the words struck him like a sword. The next day he received a note, so sad, from little Nellie. It said she loved him still, but he must not come again. Her father said so. He commanded her to listen to Richard Ross; she had never disobeyed her father yet; she could not do so now. "But I will plead and pray, dear Joe, and you must hope."

Time went on, and the blacksmith grew paler yet. He grew morose, too, and unlike himself; and the village loungers no longer loved to gather at his forge. The name of Richard Ross maddened him. Once he caught one by the throat for saying Richard and Nellie were to be married soon.

One day the idiot of the village, "Crazy Sam," stood watching Joe. The lad had something on his weak mind, and nodded and shook his head in glee; then he drew from his pocket two silver pieces and gazed on them with swelling pride. Finally he asked:

"Why don't you cry, Joe Mann? Why don't you cry?"

The blacksmith glowered at him from under a frowning brow.

"I'd cry if I were you, Joe," said the idiot; "I'd cry if Richard Ross stole my gal."

"Who told you to say that?" he demanded.

"Richard Ross. He gave me the money to say it."

"The low hound!" shrieked Joe. "Heaven have mercy on his soul!"

When evening drew on, he picked up a long, rusty knife blade, and fitted it into a stout handle. Then he stepped to his grindstone, and sharpened and ground the rusty blade.

Ah! but Joe was changed! There was despair and murder in his noble heart.

The night fell; and he stood, knife in hand, silently waiting.

"Richard Ross leaves her home at ten," he muttered, "and goes on the lonely road through the woods."

When it came nine he could wait no longer, but sped away to his ambush. Behind two trees, growing close together, which completely hid him, he crouched and listened.

Joe pressed his hand to his forehead and found it burning hot. He began to be afraid, he knew not of what, perhaps of his own soul. He felt his murderous purpose weakening. He rose and walked about the wood and thought upon his wrongs. This gave him new resolve, and he returned to his hiding-place and crouched again. But again his terror was renewed, and the hand which held the knife trembled. The village clock struck ten, and at the stroke he shuddered.

He heard footsteps on the road. Nearer, nearer, came the man for whom he waited. For a moment Joe's mind seemed gone. Before his eyes he saw a great sea of trouble. From him fell great drops of cold sweat. Nearer the footsteps came. His brain cleared and he could see the young man's form a few feet from him. He gazed through the trees to the sky, and saw a single star looking down upon him like the eye of heaven. With a shriek of fear he flung the knife from him and fled—from murder.

All that night he lay like one dead upon the floor of his little shop. The morning sun, forcing its way through the dusty window, fell upon him there. Miserable as the man was, it saw no better sight than this crushed soul saved from crime.

But some one brighter than the sunlight entered at the door. It was Nellie. She saw him there upon the floor, and her blue eyes filled with tears. She bent over him and touched him gently.

"Joe! dear Joe!" she called.

He sprung to his feet, gazed on her coldly, and would have fled, but she restrained him.

"Joe," she said, "I have hoped—I have pleaded—I have prayed—I have won. Take me in your arms."

Not yet did he understand her, and she added:

"Father has learned to pity you and me, Joe, and says we may be husband and wife. Richard Ross has gone forever."

So Joe took her in his arms, and all his repentance and joy burst forth in a flood of tears.

ATTACKED BY STOWAWAYS.

"Ay, ay, shipmates, I know it is my turn now, so hold up while I get wind," said old Jack Caswell, as we lay becalmed off St. Verne one sultry day in August, and to pass away the time, that hung rather heavily on our hands, were engaged in story-telling.

"Let's see," he began, after a moment's reflection, "it was in the season of '56 that I hired under old Captain Warrenton, who run a schooner on the coasts of the Gulf. She was a small craft, of not more than one hundred and fifty tons burden, and on the trip I am speaking of was loaded at Mobile with a cargo for New Orleans.

"Besides the skipper and myself, then a lad of only fifteen, there was but one hand. As the craft was easily handled and the runs short, Captain Warrenton seldom ever shipped more than four; and on this time, when he got ready to sail, and one of the men couldn't be found, he concluded to start with me and the other one, a sailor named Ned Allen, for there was a prospect of a quick and easy passage.

"There was great excitement in Mobile at the time over the escape of a couple of villains from the jail, who had been recently captured and were waiting trial for murder. I don't believe a tougher pair of rascals were ever found in Alabama than Ruell Victor and Dennis Lorne. They had killed as many as half a dozen persons, to say nothing of other crimes without number of which they were guilty.

"The authorities did their best to recapture them, but no trace of the desperadoes could be found, and the day we left port three thousand dollars reward was offered for them, or one-half that sum for either of them.

"Well, we had a fair wind for a start, and ran down the bay, standing off between the Dauphin and the Point at about six.

"About that time I had occasion to go into the forepeak to get some rope yarn. Now we had no forecastle parted off from the hold, as there was room enough for all in the cabin, and we had this stowaway in between the bows, where we chuck away our old trumpery.

"I was hard at work unlaying a piece of rope for the yarns, when I thought I heard a noise among the boxes in the hold. Listening a moment with my ear close to the bulkhead, I knew some one was in there. As the captain and Allen were above, I wondered who it could be, and kept perfectly still to see if I could find out.

"I was not kept in suspense long, for pretty soon I heard a man speak, and then another answered him.

"You may believe I was all attention then, and I soon discovered that our passengers were none others than Ruell Victor and Dennis Lorne, the desperadoes who had escaped from the Mobile jail.

"From what they said, I found that they had crawled into the hold and stowed themselves away so well that we had not seen them when we had finished loading. They had got provisions enough to live on a day or two, and were planning to come on deck at dark, overpower us, and put to sea. They were armed, and, what frightened me the most (for you must remember I was only a boy, though nearly as large as I am now), they had hired Ned

Allen to help them! This would make them three against the captain and myself.

"As they had been further aft when I first came down, and were now getting back to their old corner, I felt that they had not heard me, so I crept back to the deck as quietly as possible.

"We were then leaving the lighthouse out of sight and it would soon be dark, so that I was anxious to tell the skipper what I had discovered.

"The captain was a big, brave man, but he trembled when I told my story.

"In a moment, however, the captain asked if I thought I could carry a steady hand in a tight fix; and, telling him I could, for I knew our lives were depending on it, his eyes flashed as he said:

"Good, my boy! If you don't fail me, we will fix the scoundrels, or my name isn't Joe Warrenton. Keep up your courage, do as I say, and fifteen hundred dollars are yours."

"Seeing Allen coming up the companionway at that moment, Warrenton motioned for me to take the helm, and hurried to meet the sailor just as he gained the deck.

"Before the traitor saw what was coming, the captain seized him by the throat and bore the wretch to the deck, just as if he had been a child, without any outcry escaping his lips.

"Getting a piece of tarred rope and some bunting, we gagged and bound the ruffian in a few moments.

"Soon after dark the skipper said he heard them removing a board from the bulkhead.

"Captain Warrenton had cautiously crawled forward behind the bitts by the bowsprit, weapon in hand, and now motioned to me to leave the helm and join him. The tiller was lashed so that all was safe in that quarter.

"I had barely time to reach the bitts, which I had done in silence, when the scoundrels were moving in the rubbish in the forepeak.

"The captain touched me, and I knew the time for action had come.

"While the rascals stood for an instant as if trying to see where we were, we sprang upon them.

"I seemed to possess ten times my ordinary strength, I had nerved myself up so, and you may believe I put all my power into a blow. However, the villain saw me in season to partially dodge it, so that it fell upon his shoulder, and the next I knew he had sprung upon me.

"But my second clip, which I was not long in dealing, fetched him, and, as he fell, Warrenton turned to help me, he having fixed his man at a single stroke.

"It was a good while before I could fully realize that we had really overcome the burly desperadoes; but, there they were, securely bound; and, in spite of their threats and entreaties, we put back to port and gave them up to the authorities, receiving the reward of three thousand dollars, which the captain generously shared with me.

"Ned Allen received his just punishment, while both of the others afterwards expiated their crimes on the gallows.

"Readily procuring a couple of new hands, we again put to sea, none the worse for our little adventure."

NEWS OF THE DAY

The Persian crown is made of pure gold, incrusted with precious stones. The Persians declare that the crown is 3,000 years old and belonged to Saladin. A new emerald is added at each coronation. It was formerly the custom for the crown to be suspended by a chain and for the shah to stand under it, but now two statesmen place it upon the ruler's head.

An improved baseball bat is the recent invention of George J. Blahos, a sailor on board the U. S. S. Mississippi. His device can be applied to any bat by any carpenter. It consists in cutting slots in the thick or batting end of the bat, inserting in them strips of nonresilient material—cardboard, for instance—fastening these with a peg driven through at right angles to them. This bat is especially designed for bunting, as when the ball is struck with the plane of the nonresilient strips presented to it, the blow is much deadened. When the edges of the strips are used in striking the ball, the reaction is substantially the same as when an ordinary bat is used.

Ralph H. Upson, who returned recently from abroad where he went in the interests of an American rubber tire concern, said that the Lewis machine gun, invented by Col. I. N. Lewis, U. S. A., retired, which was adopted by the French War Office, has proved so effective that it is now being mounted in the new French battle planes for aerial attack. Several of the guns were captured, he said, after desperate attacks by the Germans with the purpose of getting them and having them copied by the Krupps. The Allies, Mr. Upson added, are now removing all other makes of the machine guns from the first line trenches and aeroplanes as fast as the Lewis guns can be obtained to take their places.

An emergency telegraph code is proposed by Luis Jackson, of Montclair, N. J., for which he claims that it will "place the entire rank and file of a railroad in a position to use the wires, and make every man in the army or navy a telegrapher in emergencies." It uses only dots and spaces, no dashes, and for emergency might be worth remembering owing to the simplicity of its idea. It would probably be too cumbersome for other use, however, taking 157 dots to represent the entire alphabet, where the Morse

code takes 77 dots and dashes. The idea can hardly be regarded as a new one, for the code is simply the method of dividing the letters of the alphabet into five groups, in their order; the first number of dots tapped indicates the group number, and the second number tapped the position of a letter in its group. This is practically the code known in most prisons and used with such success in communication between political prisoners in Russia, well known to the public through its description by George Kennan and other writers.

One fox was captured and six escaped in the annual fox drive in Northern Tippecanoe County, Ind., recently. More than 500 men and boys took part in the round-up. They all carried noise-making devices, but clubs, dogs and guns were barred. An immense circle was formed, covering an area nearly fifteen square miles in extent. All made for a given point in the center. Despite the vigilant work half a dozen foxes inside the circle managed to get through the line. At the round-up on the William Ross farm several boys finally ran the lone remaining fox down and captured it. An auction sale was held and \$50 was derived for charity. The women of the Pleasant Grove Church served lunch to the crowd. Farmers in the vicinity of the fox drive have been losing poultry for several weeks due to visits of the hungry foxes.

PREMIUMS GIVEN AWAY

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INTERESTING ARTICLES

DRIVES AUTO WITH HIS FEET.

With a caution to drive carefully and avoid bad roads, the State granted an auto license to Irving Collins, of Mansfield, Conn., following a hearing before State Secretary Charles B. Burns. Collins, whose right hand has been amputated, has rigged up his auto so he can shift gears with his feet. He is the owner of a poultry farm at Mansfield, and has a summer hotel at Waterford. Because of business, he travels about the country a good deal.

WHAT A RAT'S NEST CONTAINED.

Martyn Black, a logging man, of Freeling, Virginia, who operates in the "north" of Cumberland Mountain, bought a small crib of corn of a mountaineer who was moving away. While shelling out the corn he found a rats' nest, which contained, besides seven young rodents, a pencil, spoon, small penknife, corkscrew and seven dollars in currency—two ones and a five. The larger bill had been cut in three pieces, while the smaller bills remained intact. The torn bill was mended with paste and tissue paper, and was, as Black said, "as good as new."

LOOKING FORWARD.

During the hearings on the army appropriation bill, Brig.-Gen. Henry D. Sharpe, Q. M. Corps, recommended the purchase of \$4,500,000 worth of cloth annually for four years, at the end of which time there would be on hand a reserve amounting to \$17,000,000. This would furnish the uniforms and tents for 800,000 men. The tents and uniforms, should war come, would be manufactured before the men could be enlisted and mobilized. The manufacturers of uniforms, etc., would be supplied with patterns and specifications, and the clothing for a million men could be turned out in a few weeks.

FINDING YOUR WAY BY THE STARS.

The need of soldiers, when marching or scouting at night, for a ready means of keeping their bearings is designed to be met in a little book recently published in England by R. Weatherhead, entitled "The Star Pocket-book." This book not only serves as a guide to the constellations, but also shows how the stars may be used for determining time and directions. There are tables showing the dates when certain stars cross the meridian at midnight, and the highest altitudes of stars in various latitudes. There are also lists of "simul-transit pairs," i. e., stars which transit at the same time, and which, when vertical, mark the meridian.

ARMY DESERTION EXAGGERATED.

In the course of a speech delivered before the Anti-War League of Mount Vernon, N. Y., Representative Warren Worth Bailey, of Pennsylvania, said that one-fifth of all the men in the United States army were deserters. This is a perfectly typical illustration of the loose statements made about the army by too many public men who ought

to know better and which do a grave injustice to the Service because laymen so seldom hear the exact facts when a refutation of such a statement is made. It is particularly inexcusable for a member of Congress to make such a grievous misstatement when there is sent every year to the Congress of which he is a member the annual report of the adjutant-general of the army, which contains statistics that any member of the Government ought to be familiar with before he talks on such a subject. In the annual report of the adjutant-general for the year ending June 30, 1915, the aggregate number of desertions for all branches of the Service, including West Point detachments, Indian and Philippine scouts, casuals and recruits at depots and en route, is stated at 4,457. This is about four and a half per cent. of the aggregate enlisted strength of the army, which ranged from 92,877 at the beginning of the fiscal year 1915 to 101,195 at its close.

DOUBLE STARS.

Many stars that appear single to the naked eye are found to consist of two stars close to each other when examined through a powerful telescope. They are called double stars, and several thousands have been observed by astronomers.

There are two classes of double stars. The first consists of those that only look double. These appear double because they are nearly in the same line of vision as seen from the earth, though they have no connection, and one star may be very much nearer to us than the other. The second-class consists of those really double, or binary stars, where one star revolves about the other or where each revolves around the center of gravity common to the pair, forming what is called a binary system.

Many double stars have been found to perform such a revolution. This is generally very slow, requiring centuries for its completion. A few binary stars, however, revolve so rapidly that a complete revolution has taken place since they were first observed. There are some whose period is less than a century.

The colors of double stars are superbly brilliant and varied. The components often shine in contrast colors, one being blue and the other yellow, or one being green and the other yellow. Sometimes the companions are purple and white or red and white, or both are white.

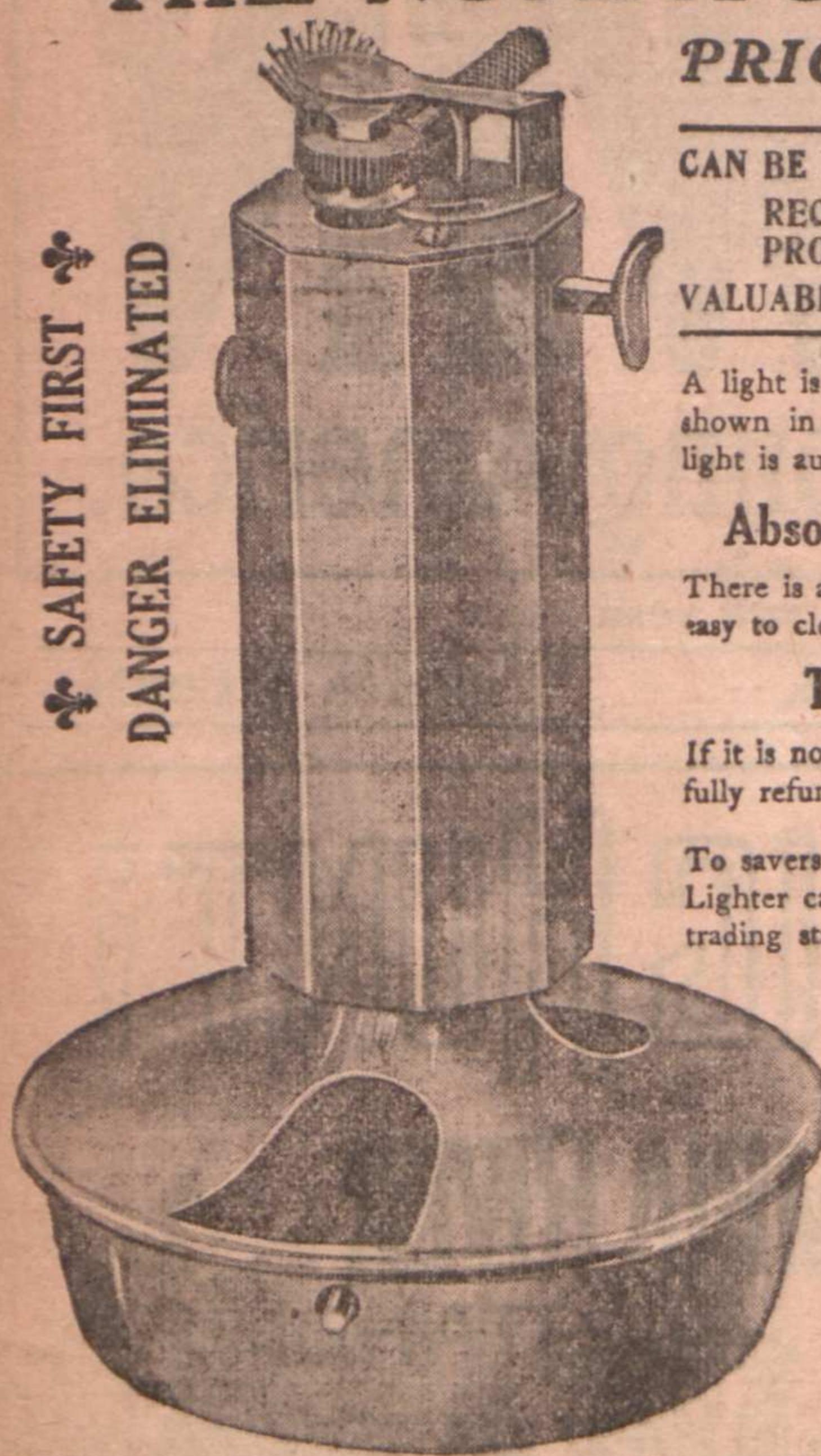
A few stars are known as naked-eye doubles. One is a small star in Lyra, near the bright Vega. A sharp-eyed observer may see it double, says the Washington Star. A low power of the telescope will separate it into two white stars wide apart. A high power will separate each of the two components into two stars. This tiny star is, therefore, a double double, forming a quadruple system.

A beautiful double star easy to find is Albireo. One of the components is of the third and the other of the fifth magnitude. The colors are golden yellow and sapphire blue.

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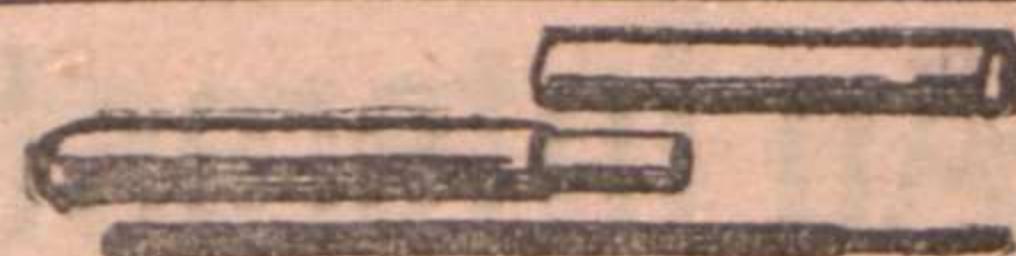
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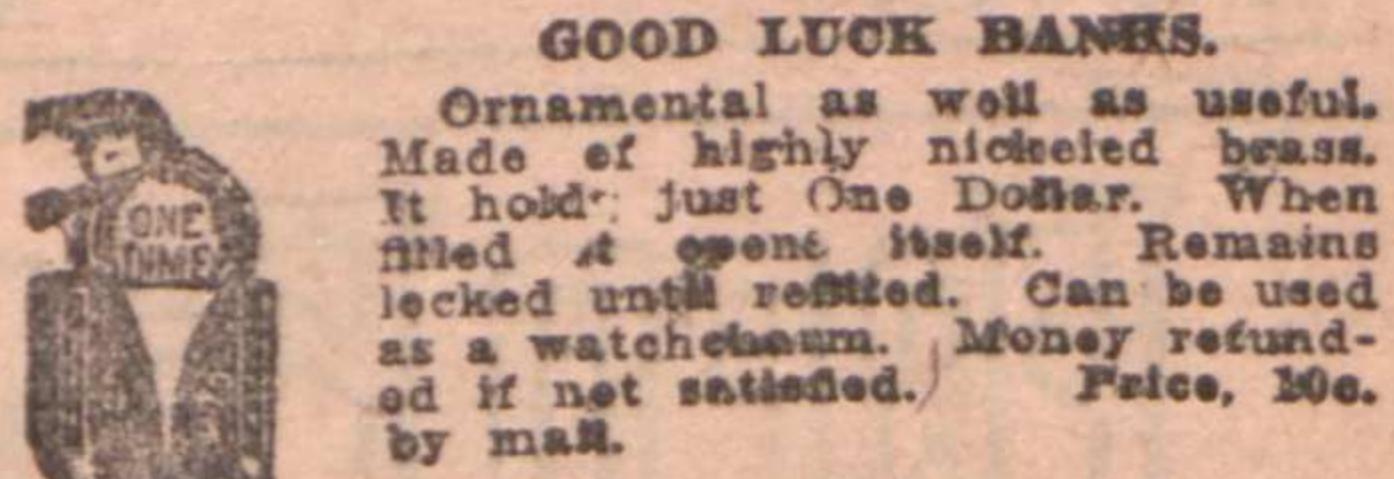
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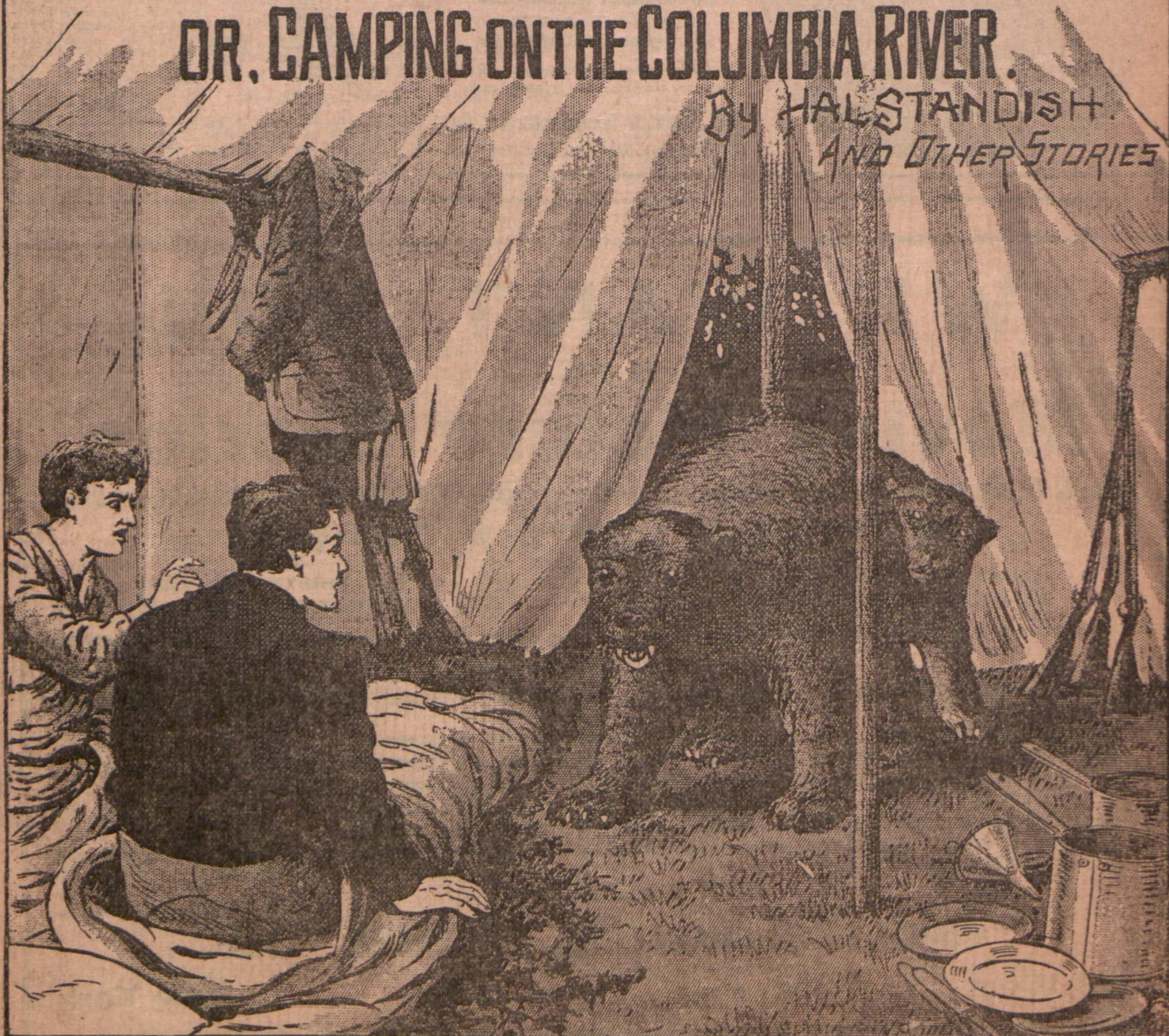
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